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Thomas Srampickal

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The Family, Cradle of Love and Life

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Editorial

The human differs from the infra-human in more than one way. Most of the distinctive features like intelligence, freedom and the like are such that essentially differentiate the former from the latter. However, there is a difference which at first sight at least appears to be a liability, namely the long period required for human development. While an infrahuman being matures and begins its life in a few months or a couple of years, the human takes many years to reach maturity. The human development, as we know, is a more complex process involving a harmonious integration of physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral and spiritual factors. All this needs appropriate support and feedback from the environment. And the *family* is the primary and most important 'social unit' which nurtures and directs the course of this development and thus guides the character and destiny of the society.

There was a time when the importance of the family was taken for granted. Gradually in the wake of social mobility, pressures of life, sexual revolution etc., the importance of the family came under attack and its values depreciated though not at the same intensity everywhere. But the consequences of decades of disintegrated family life force us today to recognize the family and to restore its values again. The UN-sponsored International Year of the Family, the Cairo Conference on Population and Development and other similar regional and international family centred programmes are signs of this renewed awareness. Amidst this ebb and flow the catholic church is a bulwark which has constantly and forcefully stood up for the protection and promotion of the family. Through this issue in this 'Year of the Family' *Jeevadhara* intends to contribute its mite to the cause of promoting the welfare of the family.

All the authors of articles in this issue convey the message that the family is the cradle of love and life, comradeship and communion. Amid the welter of disintegrating families let this message be an incentive to families for holding together to stop the rot.

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Thomas Srampickal

Family in the Indian Tradition: Abode of Personal and Social Values

India is a land blessed with different languages, cultures, customs and religions. The age-old traditions and customs of these religions have had considerable influence on family life in India. Hinduism, for example, considers family life as a very significant social institution. According to Hindu Scriptures, the four great stages of human life are Studentship (Brahmacarya), Householder (Grhastha), Hermit (Vanaprastha) and Total Renunciation (Sannyasa). Of these, Grhastha, or family life is of supreme social significance because it is the ground which nurtures the growth and perfection of the individual, which consists in fulfilling one's duties and obligations. The house-holder is called to be a sacrificer, pro-creator, bread-winner, educator, self-giver etc. Thus the family consisting of parents and offspring and involving mutual relations and various sacred obligations is rightly considered to be a temple.

The Catholic Church and the U. N. have declared 1994 to be an international year of family. Keen interest has been taken by different quarters of the world to suggest ways and means to improve family life and to promote family values among the people. Family is facing crucial problems from within and without. So it is very important to have a better understanding of family life and find out a solution to the problems which are threatening its very existence. We are passing through a period in which religious fanaticism and ethnic clashes are at their peak. Hence, it is quite fitting to reflect on the family in the multi-religious context of India.

In every culture and society the family system differs in its economic, social and cultural milieu. "The family is a universal and tremendously variable social organism, differing in size, authority, patterns, modes of determining residence and

descent and the number and types of functions that it performs"¹. The observation of G. R. Leslie on the family is applicable to families in the multi-religious context of India. The various forms of families are usually grouped in the following manner: simple or composite; monogamous or polygamous. They exist as independent or a mixture of both forms. Each of these forms has got its advantages and disadvantages in family life. However, the family system in each culture has its own specialities.

India is a land blessed with different faiths, languages and cultures, customs and cults. Among these varieties of faiths and cultures there is a common cultural link which unites all the peoples of India, namely the Indian culture. This cultural link is mostly mirrored in their social institutions such as marriage, family and places of worship. In the multi-religious context of India, the christian family enjoys a long history of stability and a strength of solidarity. Even though the socio-structural pattern of India is in constant change as elsewhere in the world, one can witness a relatively solid family life in India, when compared to other parts of the world. The classic type of Indian family is that of the joint family².

Christian families in India have much to give and take from the major religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The age old traditions and cultures of these religions had and still have a great influence on the life of christian families and vice-versa. These influences are more perceptible in the developed regions of India such as the state of Kerala. Compared to the other states of India, Kerala has a higher percentage of christian population, namely, 20.56%. So, the interaction between the religious groups is greater and more intensive and the effects of these interactions are stronger in the realms of culture, social customs and family life. The faith-centred attitude of the St. Thomas christians towards the reality of marriage and family life has been mainly responsible for the stability and strength of the family. This is a religious attitude which has its foundation in the deep sense of sacredness given to marriage among the Hindus, which the St. Thomas christians

1 G. R. Leslie, "Family", in *American People's Encyclopedia*, vol. 8, New York: 1962, 298.

2 K. M. Kapadia, *Marriage and Family in India*, London: 1966, 245.

have inculturated in the light of their own traditions as derived from the Bible and other ancient Jewish traditions³.

1. Socio-Familial structure of Hinduism: the four *Aśramas*

Hindus believe that the realization of *brahman* is the supreme goal of human life. In order to achieve this end, one has to dedicate one's whole life without compartmentalization⁴. The *varnāśramadharma*⁵ (the code of life based on the division of society) is the means to attain this highest goal. The code of life finds its most vivid expression in three great structures⁶: the four castes or classes (*varna*)⁷, the four stages of life (*asrama*) and the four values of man *puruṣārtha*, namely, righteousness, wealth, love and salvation (*dharma, artha, kama* and *mokṣa*). The *varnasramadharma* shows the natural evolution of social and familial life in order to attain the highest knowledge of *brahman*. Normally a Hindu attains his life goal (*paramapuruṣārtha*) through the four stages of life (*aśramas*)⁸. This four-stage life span of a Hindu is marked with *samskaras* (religious rites of a sacramental character) from the time of conception (*garbhadhana*) till death, culminating in the funeral rites (*anteysti*)⁹. The ancient lawgivers like *Gautama* and *Manu* enumerate a number of such *samskaras*¹⁰. These four *asramas* accompanied by the devoted performance of *samskaras* help him, as a means to the gradual realization of the highest knowledge that is *brahman*¹¹.

3 Mathew Koikara, *The Sacredness of Marriage and Family in the Cultural Milieu of St. Thomas Christians*, Roma: 1988, iii.

4 Ch. Up., vi: 1

5 R. Ramachandra, *Social Institutions among the Hindus*, Mysore: 1969, 51; S. D. Goswami, *Readings in Vedic Literature*, Bombay: 1977, 65.

6 A. Embree, (ed.), *The Hindu Tradition*, New York: 1972, 74.

7 R. K. Mookerji, *Ancient Indian Education*, Delhi: 1974, 151-157.

8 Anto P. Thekkuden, *Sannyasa and the Spiritual Formation in Hinduism*, Alwaye: 1988, Documentation no. 10, 2.

9 The main *samskaras* are *garbhadhana* (the sacrament of conception), *pumsavana* (for securing male progeny), *simantonayana* (performed in the 7th month of pregnancy to counteract the malevolent influences, to protect the womb and to secure safe delivery), *jatakakarma* (sacrament of nativity), *namakarana* (name-giving), *annaprasana* (first feeding of solid food), *cudakarana* (first hair-cut), *upanayana* (initiation), *samavarttana* (home-coming), (he becomes a *snataka*), *garhastya* (marriage), *anteysti* (funeral rites).

10 R. Ramachandra, *Social Institutions among Hindus*, 45.

11 Anto P. Thekkuden, *Sannyasa and the Spiritual Formation in Hinduism*, 2.

The four stages of life described in the Hindu scriptures are called *āśramas*. They are: *brahmacarya*, *grhastha*, *vānaprastha* and *sannyasa* (student, householder, hermit or forest-dweller and renouncer). The expression *asrama* is derived from the root "sram", which means to exert, to work and the prefix "a" carries the significance of field or area. The word *asrama* means, place of exertion, field for activity and a state of life with specific functions¹². Based on an ideological tradition, the span of life of a hundred years is divided into four successive stages of unequal durations. Panini, the great grammarian of the third century B. C., was familiar with these four *asramas* and, during the days of Vatsyayana, the Hindu society was already based on the fourfold *asrama* scheme¹³. Thus, from a very ancient period of history, the whole life of a Hindu was directed and disciplined by the rules of these four successive *asramas*.

Explicit mention of *asramas* is not found in the *R̥gveda*, but occasional reference can be seen in some late Upaniṣadic texts. When dealing with formation, the theory of the four *asramas* is found in the Upaniṣads. In the *Jabala Upaniṣad* we read "when the period of studentship ends, a man becomes a householder; after he has been a householder, he becomes an anchorite, after he has been an anchorite let him travel about on pilgrimage"¹⁴.

1. a. Brahmacarya (Studentship)

The word *brahmacarin* means one who walks with Brahman or moves in Brahman. In order to walk with Brahman one must know the vedas. Vedic knowledge is necessary for a healthy religious life. To acquire vedic knowledge, one needs instruction from a guru or teacher who is a master of Vedas and Upaniṣads. Following the rite of initiation¹⁵, a student starts living with his *guru* or teacher as a member of the latter's house (*antevasin*), learning the great lessons of life, imbibing the best of traditions

12 P. V. Kane, *The History of Dharmasastras*, Pune: 1946, Vol. II, part. 1. 425. Cf. S. D. Goswami, *Reading in Vedic Literature*, 68-70; Sr. Vandana, *Gurus, Asramas, and Christians*, London: 1978, 38-53; R.K. Mukerji *Ancient Indian Education*, Delhi: 1974, 157.

13 R. Ramachandra, *Social Institutions among the Hindus*, 49.

14 *Jabala Upaniṣad*, iv. W. Monier, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, Delhi: 1976, 129.

15 *Manu*, II: 149; *Manu* III: 170.

and acquiring skills.¹⁶ Admission is given only to the three upper classes.¹⁷ The lower classes are not allowed to study Vedas. The main subject of study is Vedas in addition to archery, the science of war, medicine, astrology and music. This is a matter of several years¹⁸. Studentship is a long period of high discipline and austerities leading to the acquisition of knowledge and virtuous life.¹⁹

The interpersonal relationship that exists and develops in the course of time between the pupil (*śiṣya*) and the teacher (*guru*) is an interesting theme in Indian literature. It is really a force that strengthens the life of the individual. Twelve years should be the shortest time for the student's residency with his teacher for learning only a single veda.²⁰ In return for this instruction, the pupils work for the teacher, in the house and field; they tend the sacred fires, look after the cattle of the teacher, collect the usual gifts of charity for him from the village, and bestow presents upon him at the conclusion of their studies. At the close of the period of studentship they are sent home with the advice:

Speak truth; follow the prescribed conduct; be not heedless about the solemn recitation of scriptures; (at the time of your departure from your preceptor) offer to him the gift liked by him, and take care that the line of your race is not broken. Do not fail to pay attention to truth; never fail to pay heed to the performance of duty; do not be careless about what is proper and good; be not negligent of well-being; never be indifferent to the study and imparting of the veda; be mindful of what is to be offered to the gods and manes. Let your mother be a god to you; let your father be treated like a god; let your preceptor receive divine honour; let your guests receive from your hospitality like a god. Those acts that are irreproachable alone are to be performed and not those that are their contrary. You must be intent on the virtuous actions that proceed from us and never on the contrary.²¹

16 It is possible for a man to receive instruction from his father *Ch. Up.*, V: 3. 1, or at the hands of other teachers (*Taitt. Up.*, 1:4.3)

17 *Manu*, X: 1-4. 18 *Manu* II: 38. 19 *Ap. Dh. S.*, 1: 1.3. 12-25.

20 A. Embree, (ed.), *The Hindu Tradition*, 84; *Ap. Dh. S.*, 1:1.2.

21 *Tait. Up.*, 1: 11.

When the studentship period is completed, the student usually returns home, gets married and starts his life as *grhastha* namely, householder. There are exceptions to this custom. Those who prefer to stay with the teacher to the end of their lives are called *naisthika brahmacarin*.²² In Upanisads, the ideal of *brahmacarya* is widened so as to embrace not merely the student period but the entire course of life regulated by the disciplines of its four successive *asramas* as the way that leads to the brahman or the self.²³ In the *Brhadaranyaka Upaniṣad* we read: "the seekers of brahman wish to realise it through regular reading of the vedas, sacrifices, charity and austerity not leading to death. Knowing it alone one becomes a man of meditation. Seeking this world (of the self) alone monks give up their homes".²⁴ "The ancient knowers, it is said, did not desire progeny, thinking, 'what shall we do with progeny, we who have realised this world, this self'? Giving up the desire for sons, for wealth and for worlds, they took up a wandering mendicant's life."²⁵ In the same way, in the *Chandogya Upaniṣad* we read:

Three are the branches of the religious duty. Sacrifice, study and gifts these are the first. Austerity alone is the second, and the celibate student of sacred knowledge, who lives in the house of the teacher throughout his life mortify his body in the teacher's house, is the third. All these become possessors of meritorious worlds; but he who is established firmly in brahman attains immortality.²⁶

1. b. *Grhastha* (Householder)

The completion of the studies of Vedas with a guru is marked by a ceremony called *samavartana*, meaning a formal sending away after the studies from the household of the guru. The duties and obligations of the *grhastha* are detailed in the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*. One can get more information on marriage and the order of *grhastha* from the *dharmasastras*.²⁷

The householder has a right to offer sacrifices for his deceased parents and relatives. Also, he can enter into active

22 *Ch. Up.*, II: 23. 1.

23 R. K. Mookerji, *Ancient Indian Education: Brahmanical and Buddhist*, 2 ed., New Delhi: 1951, 96.

24 *Br. Up.*, IV: 4. 22 25 *Br. Up.*, IV: 4. 22. 26 *Ch. Up.*, 2: 23. 1.

27 *Manu*, IV: 1., *Manu*, III: 77-79.

participation with the community and administer the sacramental rites (*samskaras*). As the head of the family, he performs sacrifices which are considered to be very important. In the performance of these sacrifices, he must show great attention and devotion. As householder, three functions are singled out for his particular attention: the performance of religious rites (*dharmasamapthi*) by which the maintenance of the tradition through the performance of certain rituals are kept, the continuance of the family line by begetting children (*praja*, or *putra*), and the enjoyment of the pleasures of physical love (*rati*)²⁸.

1. c. *Vanaprastha* (Hermit or Forest-Dweller)

As a householder, after fulfilling his religious duties of sacrifice and of charity in the family, he entrusts his son with the responsibility to continue his duties and retires into the solitude of a forest where he spends his time in quiet contemplation²⁹. This is a gradual preparation for entering into the last stage of an austere life. *Yajñavalkya* teaches in the *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad*, "realising this very self, brahmanas give up the desire for sons, for wealth and for worlds, and take up a wandering mendicant's life".³⁰ We have the example of king *Brharatha*. King *Brharatha*, establishing his son in the kingdom, went forth into the forest where he performed extreme austerities.³¹

Greater emphasis is given to the practice of asceticism, which is a specific characteristic of this age. The one who is in this stage is advanced in age and is expected to live a very austere life in the forest. He is expected to live outdoors hopefully relying upon roots and fruits for his food.³² The one who desires to enter into this stage of life must abandon all his belongings before departing to the forest. A *Vanaprastha* should have attained a great degree of maturity and holiness. The scriptures were written in this stage.

1. d. *Sannyasa* (Radical Renunciation)

The *sannyasa*, the fourth and highest stage or *asrama*, is the abandonment of the entire brahmanical mode of life. The

28 *Manu*, VI: 87-89; *Ap. Dh. S.*, II: 9. 21-22; P. V. Kane, *The History of the Dharma Sastras*, Pune: 1946, 424-425; Anto P. Thekkuden, *Sannyasa and Spiritual Formation in Hinduism*, 6.

29 *Manu*, VI: 2-8, 25; *Br. Up.*, II: 4. 1.

30 *Br. Up.*, III: 5. 1.

31 *Br. Up.*, III: 5. 1.

32 *Maitri. Up.*, 1; 2.

Word '*sannyasa*' in fact means total and radical renunciation of all worldly possessions. The one who is in the stage of *sannyasa* is a *sannyasin* who renounces the world and leads an austere life, enjoys highest freedom and, is not bound by common laws and obligations. He has already bidden farewell to the customs and conventions of the world. He has no proper home of his own and lives upon alms. His only concern is to contemplate the mysteries of life, and his virtue consists in his mastery over his faculties and senses. He is known as *parivrajaka* (wanderer), *bhikṣu* (beggar).³³ *Manu* describes the purpose of *sannyasa*:

Departing from his house fully provided with the means of purification (*pavitra*), let him wander about absolutely silent and carrying nothing for enjoyments that may be offered (to him). Let him not desire to die, let him not desire to live, let him wait for (his appointed) time, as servant (waits) for the payment of his wages.³⁴

In order to renounce the world, one need not wait till an advanced age. At any period of life, one could freely enter into the stage of *sannyasa*, a withdrawing from worldly pursuits abbreviating or omitting altogether the preceding stages, and assuming in early youth the order of *sannyasa*.³⁵ *Sannyasa* was originally a natural consequence of the knowledge of *brahman* or *atman*, but later it became the final and most efficacious means by which one hoped to attain that knowledge.³⁶

2. 1. The Theology of the *Grhastha Asrama*

According to *Manu*, family life has a supreme social value. It is the ground upon which the householder moves towards full social growth. The teaching of *Manu* is that the upper classes of society must enter into the state of marriage upon completing their study of the vedas and the attainment of sufficient maturity. *Manu* gives the definition of the perfect man in the following way: "He only is a perfect man who consists of himself, his wife, and his offspring (three persons united), thus (says

33 R. Ramachandra, *Social Institutions among the Hindus*, 49.

34 *Manu*, VI: 41; 45.

35 A. S. Geden, "Renunciation", *Encyclopedia of Religious Ethics*, vol. X, 730.

36 W. Monier, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, Delhi, 1976, 128.

the veda), and (learned) brahmanas propound this (maxim) likewise, the husband is declared to be one with the wife"³⁷.

Man is called to be holy and perfect. Perfection consists in fulfilling one's duties and obligations of life. Among the four *asramas* the householder is declared to be superior, for he supports the other three³⁸. Marriage is a sacred rite and is considered to be a sacrament (*samskara*) by the Hindus. *Manu* has a very sublime view of marriage as a fundamental type of union in society. The institution of marriage is an important instrument in dispensing the ordained duties of the *varnasrama dharma*. Hence, a man could marry only a woman of his own *varna* (caste). This is said to be in the best interests of eugenics to ensure the purity of the line and the elimination of the defects of the species³⁹. *Manu* enumerates eight forms⁴⁰ of marriage: they are: 1) *brāhma* 2) *daiva* 3) *ārṣa* 4) *prājāpatya* 5) *asura* 6) *gandharva* 7) *rakṣasa* 8) *paiśaca*⁴¹. *Manu* has divided the eight methods into two groups, *praśasta* or approved and *aprasasta* or disapproved⁴². The first four are *prasasta*, the rest are *aprasasta*. The first four methods are regarded praiseworthy, among which the first was the best, the fifth and the sixth were tolerated and the last two were forbidden. At present the only two forms, *brahma* and *asura* are recognized⁴³.

Brahma was the purest and the most evolved method of marriage. It was called so, because it was intended for the brahmanas. In it the girl was given by the father, with such ornaments as he could afford, to a man of character and learning, whom he invited voluntarily and received respectfully without taking anything in return⁴⁴.

*Daiva*⁴⁵ forms the decorated girl given away by the father to a priest, who officiated at a sacrifice commenced by

37 *Manu*, IX: 45.

38 *Manu*, VI: 89.

39 V. Ragavan, "Manusamhita", *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Calcutta: 1962, vol. 2, 350.

40 Almost all earlier *Dharma Sutras* and *Smritis* mention the same number.

41 *Manu* III: 21.

42 *Manu*, III: 24-25; Cf. Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*, Revised Edition, Delhi: 1969, 159.

43 Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*, 159.

44 *Manu*, III: 27.

45 A. G. S., 1. 6.

him. According to *Baudhayana*⁴⁶ the girl was given as a *dakṣina* or sacrificial fee. It was called *daiva*, because in it the gift was made on the occasion of a *daiva* sacrifice. The gift of maiden in marriage for services rendered is illustrated even in vedic literature⁴⁷.

Arsa method of marriage excelled the *prajapatya* in order or merit. According to this method the father of the bride received from the bridegroom a pair of kine or two for the uses prescribed by law, e. g., the performance of some sacrifice⁴⁸.

*Prajapatya*⁴⁹ method of marriage consists in that the father gave away his daughter to a suitor on the distinct understanding that they should both perform their civic duties together⁵⁰. The father, here, obtained some sort of bond from the bridegroom who himself came forward as the suitor for marriage⁵¹.

Asura form of marriage was considered a bit superior to the *gandharva* method of marriage. "Where the husband, after having paid money to the relations of the bride and the bride herself, accepts her out of free will, it is called the *asura* type of marriage"⁵². Money was the main consideration in this type of marriage, and it was more or less, a purchase.

According to *Manu*, the definition of *gandharva* type of marriage was "where the bride and bridegroom meet each other of their own accord and the meeting is consummated in copulation born of passion, that form is called *gandharva*"⁵³. In this form of marriage, parents of the girl have nothing to do with the selection of the bridegroom, but the bride and bridegroom arranged it among themselves out of sensual inclination⁵⁴.

Manu gives the following definition to the *rakṣasa* type of marriage. It says: "capture of a girl by force while she is crying and weeping, having killed, scattered and injured her relatives is called *rakṣasa-vivaha*"⁵⁵. In this method the bridegroom did not wait for the consent of the father or of the

46 B. D. S., *Baudhayana Dharmasutra*.

47 Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samakaras*, 169.

48 A.G.S., 1. 6; *Manu*, III: 29.

49 A.G.S., 1.6.

51 Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*, 167.

52 *Manu*, III: 31.

54 Raj Bali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*, 162.

50 Yaj. S., 1: 60.

53 *Manu*, III: 32.

55 *Manu*, III: 33

bride herself, but took her away by force. This method was prevalent in ancient warring tribes and was considered to be savage and half-civilized.

Paiśāca type of marriage was the least approved and characterized as the basest of all methods. The capture of a girl was common with the *raksasa* method, but unconsciousness on the part of the girl and her guardians gave this a different form. According to *Manu* "when a man cohabits with a girl in loneliness when she is sleepy, mad or intoxicated, it is called the *paiśāca* method"⁵⁶.

In order to appreciate the theological and social importance of the householder we have to examine the various aspects of this sublime state of life. The following points are worthy of our consideration: *grhastha* the self giver, the sacrificer, the creator, the educator, the supporter, the protector and the bread winner.

2. 2. *Grhastha* the sustainer of *dharma* and society

After finishing his studentship, the *brahmacarin* offers gifts to his guru, as a sign of his gratitude, and returns home. Then, he marries and begins his family life as a householder. According to Hindu scriptures and tradition, among the four stages of life, that of the householder is central. In *Manu* we read: "as all rivers, both great and small, find a resting-place in the ocean, even so men of all orders find protection with householders"⁵⁷. *Manu* the greatest law-giver of Hinduism and of ancient India, judges the status of the householder as the highest and the most important among the four stages of human life. All the three *asramas* namely *brahmacarya*, *vanaprastha* and *sannyasa* are materially supported and physically protected by the *grhasthasrama*.

2. 2. 1. The three debts of the household life

Grhasthasrama supports and sustains *dharma* through the correct performance of religious duties, through support rendered to other *asramas*. Through household life, men are enabled to discharge the three debts with which they are born: the debt to the gods, to be discharged by performing sacrifices; the debt to the *ṛṣis* (sages), by maintaining the study and

⁵⁶ *Manu*, III: 34.

⁵⁷ *Manu*, VI: 90.

teaching of the vedas and allied learning; and the debt to the ancestors (*pitrs*), by begetting children⁵⁸.

2. 2. 2. The five sacrifices

Daily, the householder should also perform five sacrifices (*yajnas*): the *brahma-yajna*, learning and teaching Vedic wisdom; *pitryajna*, obligations to ancestors; the ancestors are to be further propitiated by *sradhas* (memorial rites)⁵⁹. It is the offering of water (*tarpana*) for the gratification of one's ancestors; *deva-yajna* consists of the oblations in the fire for gods; *bhutayajna* is the offering made to living beings, animals, birds etc.; *nryajna* is the reception and attention paid to guests (*atithi-pujana*)⁶⁰. It is after feeding the guests and those dependent upon them in and around the home that the husband and wife shall themselves eat⁶¹. He who cooks for himself eats sin, not food⁶².

In all cultures the family is the centre of life and activities. Virtues and qualities like hospitality, alms giving, industry, truthfulness, charity, sincerity, loyalty and fidelity to the religious life and social duties of the caste are nurtured and disciplined in the *grhastha*. One could get a clear idea of the importance of the *grhastha* if one views it from different angles. Looking from the side of *brahmacarya*, one should consider *brahmacarya* (studentship) as a stage meant to be an immediate preparation for the *grhastha*. In this stage of life, he picks up the rudiments of *Vedic* rituals and other disciplines that gradually lead him to the maturity of establishing a family. All his preparations are meant to help him lead a good household life. Also, looking from the different angles of the programme followed during the period of studentship with the guru, we receive a clear idea of the importance of the *grhastha*. In *Manu* we read:

Let him abstain from honey, meat, perfumes, garlands, substances (used for) flavouring (food), women, all substances turned acid, and from doing injury to living creatures, from anointing (his body), applying collyrium to his eyes, from the use of shoes and of an umbrella (or parasol), from

58 V. Ragavan, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, 347-348.

59 *Manu*, III: 122-285.

60 *Manu*, III: 68-81; Cf. V. Ragavan, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, 348.

61 *Manu*, III: 116-117

62 *Manu* III: 118.

(sensual) desire, anger, covetousness, dancing, singing, and playing (musical instruments)... Let him always sleep alone, let him never waste his manhood; for he who voluntarily wastes his manhood, breaks his vow⁶³.

Looking from the angle of the hermitage (*vanaprastha*) also householder (*grhasthasrama*) is important, because until his retirement to the hermitage, he has spent his life in the household and has fulfilled all his duties and religious rites towards his wife and children, and god, and has transmitted his family responsibility to his son. In the *grhastha* he has formed his character to a high degree of maturity and holiness, and, thus, ready to enter into the stage of *vanaprastha*.

When we look at *grhasthasrama* from the point of view of the *sannyasa* (life of renunciation), the importance of this *asrama* is still more evident. It is a final stage in which one is supposed to attain *brahman*. We read in *Manu*:

Let him not desire to die, let him not desire to live; let him wait for (his appointed) time, as a servant (waits) for the payment of his wages. Let him put down his foot purified by his sight, let him drink water purified by (straining with) a cloth, let him utter speech purified by truth, let him keep his heart pure. Let him patiently bear hard words, let him not insult anybody's enemy for the sake of this (perishable) body. Against an angry man let him not in return show anger, let him bless when he is cursed, and let him not utter speech, devoid of truth, scattered at the seven gates. Delighting in what refers to the soul, sitting (in the postures prescribed by yoga), entirely abstaining from sensual enjoyments, with himself for his only companion, he shall live in this world, desiring the bliss (of final liberation)⁶⁴.

All the requirements expected from a renouncer (*sannyasin*), as described in *Manu*, are to be fostered by the *grhastha*. One could see in the life of the *sannyasin* a total detachment from the world and its allurements on one side and, on the other side, a total surrender to the supreme self, *brahman*. Hence, we can rightly say that, among the four *asramas*, the *grhastha* (family) is the most important and central of the Hindu social set up.

63 *Manu*, II: 177-180.

64 *Manu*, VI: 45-49.

2. 2. 3. The self-giver

Manu depicts the householder as the giver of the self to others. The householder has given the task to render disinterested services to the whole of society. He can be rightly called a man for others. The nature of his duties and work reveals itself in his self-giving mentality without any tangible gain or reward [in this world. There are many passages in *Manu* which illustrate this aspect clearly. *Manu* says:

Let him, without tiring, always offer sacrifices and perform works of charity with faith; for offerings and charitable works, made with faith and with lawfully-earned money, procure endless rewards. Let him always practise, according to his ability, with a cheerful heart, the duty of liberality, both by sacrifices and by charitable works, if he finds a worthy recipient (for his gifts). If he is asked, let him always give something, be it ever so little, without grudging; for a worthy recipient will perhaps be found who saves him from all (guilt)⁶⁵.

Definite regulations are given to the householder for procuring money lawfully and dispensing it cheerfully among members of the society. In both cases, he is expected to perform selfless service to the whole society at the cost of his self giving. It is a matter of reasonable pride, in Indian families, that the prescriptions of *Manu* are observed. Western influences are slowly coming into Indian society. The head of the family, who makes various sacrifices to provide the necessary means for the sustenance of the members of the family, without enjoying the fruits of his labour himself, keeps everything for his children. This is the customary behaviour of the householder in the oriental tradition. A gift given by a self-forgetting individual, makes the position of the donor of the gift sublime and noble. He gives not only what he *has*, but also what he *is*. This is the donor's *kenosis*, which is the emptying of self for others. The householder makes this sort of donation to the members of his society.

2. 2. 4. The sacrificer

The householder is charged with certain domestic ceremonies and sacrifices his daily life. He takes the responsibility of a

65 *Manu*, IV: 226-228.

household by kindling the fire at the wedding. The sacrifices are meant for the well-being and prosperity of society, for the propitiation of sins committed by all, and for the benevolence of the gods. A detailed description of the sacrifices given in *Manu* is as follows:

With the sacred fire, kindled at the wedding, a householder shall perform, according to the law, the domestic ceremonies and the five (great) sacrifices, and (with that) he shall daily cook his food. A householder has five slaughter-houses (as it were, viz.) the hearth, the grinding-stone, the broom, the pestle and mortar, the water-vessel, by using which he is bound (with the fetters of sin). In order to successively expiate (the offences committed by means) of all these (five) the great sages have prescribed for householders the daily (performance of the five) great sacrifices. Teaching (and studying) is the sacrifice (offered) to brahman, the (offering of water and food called) *tarpana* the sacrifice to the manes, the burnt oblation the sacrifice offered to the gods, the bali offering that offered to the *bhutas* and the hospitable reception of guests the offering to men. They call these five sacrifices also, *ahuta*, *huta*, *prahuta*, *brahmya-huta* and *prasita*⁶⁶.

All these sacrifices are meant to promote the spiritual growth of the sacrificer and his society. The householder who fails to perform these sacrifices is considered to be dead. "But he who does not feed these five, the gods, his guests, those whom he is bound to maintain, and himself, lives not, though he breathes"⁶⁷. Through these sacrifices the householder protects the dharma. Dharma, understood as "righteousness", is an ethical imperative to attain eternal bliss. A diligent householder supports both the movable and the immovable creation through his sacrifices and prayers⁶⁸. There are beautiful comparisons and expressions for extolling the superiority of the householder. He is presented as a man of strength and character. He who is faithful in fulfilling his household duties, deserves imperishable bliss in heaven, and constant happiness in this life⁶⁹.

66 *Manu*, III: 67-70; 73

67 *Manu*, III: 72.

68 *Manu*, III: 75.

69 *Manu*, III: 76-79.

2. 2. 5. The Creator

It is in the will of the Creator that the human participates when he/she procreates children. Children are the fruit of the married couples' mutual knowing and loving. Love is a gift which is a most profound reality. Conjugal love leads the couple to reciprocal "knowledge" which makes them one flesh.⁷⁰ A similar statement is found in *Manu*.⁷¹ In *grhasthasrama*, the husband and wife, while giving themselves to each other, give birth to the offspring, who becomes a living sign of their love, a permanent symbol of their marital union, and a synthesis of their being father and mother. In the capacity of his fatherhood, the householder has the sublime title of a "creator". As a begetter of children, the householder is a co-creator with *brahman*. The transmission of life is the sacred duty of the *grhasthasrama*. This duty is to be fulfilled with love and dedication of mind for the benefit of society. 'With creation of male and female in his own image and likeness, god crowns and brings to perfection the work of his hands: he calls them to a special sharing in his love and in his power as creator and father, through their free and responsible co-operation in transmitting the gift of human life.'⁷² In Genesis we read the blessing of the first parents in the following words: "God blessed them, and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it".⁷³ Hence, the *grhasthasrama* has the fundamental task of transmitting human life as a service to society, and of bringing to actualization the blessing of the Creator — that of generating, by procreation, the divine image from person to person.⁷⁴ The role of the householder, as creator, is clear and thus, the father lives in the sons. Children are the extension of their parents. *Garbhadhana* is a sacramental rite. Here again one can see the excellence of *grhasthasrama* over the other three orders of life.

2. 2. 6. The educator

The role of the householder as an educator is as equally important as that of the creator. The parent is the first guru of the children. The task of educating the children is rooted in the

70 Gen 2: 24.

71 *Manu*, IX: 45.72 *FC*, no. 28.

73 Gen 1: 28.

74 Gen 5: 13.

primary vocation of married couples to participate in God's creative activity. It is the birthright of the children to receive a proper education in order to live a full and authentic human life. It depends upon the parents to create a family atmosphere, animate the children with love and reverence for God and others so that a well-rounded personal and social development be fostered in and among the children. "Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs."⁷⁵

Education in religion and the traditions and duties of the different *asramas* is almost exclusively given in the family. It lacks the organization or structure which is found in Christianity. The word "guru" is used also for parents. They remove the darkness of ignorance from the minds of their children. Many ideals and good principles of life take deep root in the children as a result of the exemplary lives of their parents. Childhood is an opportune time to inculcate sound principles of life. When deep convictions are rooted in one's life, they will endure till the end of life. The role of education is to draw out the latent potentialities of the person and to remove the darkness of ignorance. The mind of the child is susceptible to both good and bad, virtue and vice, right and wrong. Hence, one must be diligently attentive to plant the seeds of goodness and carefully pluck the weeds of evil.

2. 2. 7. The supporter of Dharma

In the foregoing pages, we have discussed the role of the householder as self-giver, sacrificer, creator and educator. Now, we will discuss the role of the householder as the supporter of *dharma*. Etymologically, the word *dharma* comes from the root *dhṛ* which means "to support", "to sustain" and "to protect". This etymology is derived from the vedic origins of the concept of *dharma*. In its simple meaning *dharma* and *ṛta* are synonyms, meaning "cosmic order".⁷⁶ The word *dharma* also means "righteousness" in behaviour. So, the task of the householder is to support *dharma* in the other three orders of life. He must perform this task by personal and faithful observance of *dharma* in his life and by instructing others in the diligent observance of it in

⁷⁵ FC, no 36; Also Cf. GE, no. 3.

⁷⁶ T. M. Manickam, *Dharma according to Manu and Moses*, Bangalore: 1977, 197.

their lives. In a way, it is a double task to be executed by the householder. Before instructing others, he must have a deep conviction of the worth of observing the *dharma* and, then, pass the conviction to his children. With regard to the support given by the householder to the other three orders of life, the teaching of *Manu* is clear from the following passage. It says:

As all living creatures subsist by receiving support from air, even so (the members of) all orders subsist by receiving support from the householder. Because men of the three (other) orders are daily supported by the householder with (gifts of) sacred knowledge and food, therefore, (the order of) householder is the most excellent order⁷⁷.

His assistance pertains to that of the spiritual, social and material forms. The most important support, that he can give, is that of *dharma* which is essential for the well-being of society.

2. 2. 8. The protector of the Three Orders of Life

Besides being the most important stage of life householder-ship is also the *asrama* that supports and protects the other three *asramas*, namely studentship, hermitage and the life of a renouncer. Not only supportive but also protective tasks are the duties of a householder. One could think of various kinds of protection given by the householder to his dependents. He is in charge of his wife, children, servants, the students who study with him, and the guests who stay with his family. He must be ever vigilant so as not to follow the ways of the world, but to live the pure, straightforward, honest life of a God-fearing human. The householder must ensure happiness which is the greatest good, to all and keep away all that is contrary to it. In other words, he must protect all that is noble and sublime, and control all that is mean and dirty. *Manu* insists that the householder prays in the following words: "May liberal men abound with us, may (our knowledge of) Vedas and (our) progeny increase. May faith not forsake us. May we have much to give (to the needy)".⁷⁸

2. 2. 9. Breadwinner

Speaking of the subsistence of the householder, *Manu* exhorts him to work hard and, thus, to earn his livelihood through

77 *Manu*, III: 77-78.

78 *Manu*, III: 259.

right and proper occupations. He must provide food for his family and for his guests. There are many passages in *Manu* which explain how to procure food for the other orders of life. *Manu* says:

A brahmana must seek a means of subsistence which either causes no, or at least little pain (to others), and live (by that) except in times of distress. For the purpose of gaining bare subsistence, let him accumulate property by (following those) irreproachable occupations (which are prescribed for) his (caste), without (unduly) fatiguing his body. He may subsist by *rta* (truth), and *amṛta* (ambrosia) or by *mṛta* (death) and by *pramṛta* (what causes death); or even by (the mode) called *satyanṛta* (a mixture of truth and falsehood), but never by *svavṛtti* (a dog's mode of life). By *rta* shall be understood the gleaning of corn; by *amṛta*, what is given unasked; by *mṛta*, food obtained by begging; and agriculture is declared to be *pramṛta*. But trade and (moneylending) are *satyanṛta*, even by that one may subsist. *Svavṛtti* is servitude; therefore, one should avoid it.⁷⁹

High morality of conduct in earning his subsistence is demanded from a householder. While procuring his subsistence no pain, however little it be, may be inflicted upon others. He should be docile and cautious in his relationship with others. The householder, being the breadwinner of the family and the other three orders of life, is depicted in *Manu* as a man of great integrity of character. He should not follow the path of the common man in securing riches. The advice of *Manu* on this point is clear. It says:

Whether he be rich or even in distress, let him not seek wealth through pursuits to which men cleave, nor by forbidden occupations, nor (let him accept presents) from any (giver whosoever he may be). Let him avoid all (means of acquiring wealth which impede the study of the Veda; (let him maintain himself) anyhow, but study, because that (devotion to the Veda study secures) is the realization of his aims⁸⁰.

For modern man, the advice given by *Manu* is of great significance. To listen and follow the advice given by *Manu*

79 *Manu*, IV: 2-6.

80 *Manu*, IV: 15, 17.

brings about a good deal of reform and renewal in this area of life. There is much to be improved to achieve the creation of a better world. The tendency to amass wealth is the order of the day. Much courage and determination are needed from the part of all to root out the parasites from society. We are living in a sick society; the sickness of injustice and avarice eats into the moral values and sound principles handed down to us from the sages and saints of the world.

2. 2. 10. Family as Temple

There are various epithets attributed to a household. It is a school where children receive their education from the parents. It is a temple where sacrifices and prayers are offered to gods. Among all the descriptions of a household, the most important is that of the temple. The house (*grham*) is a shrine dedicated to the god of fire (*agni*), and the sacrifices are performed around the symbolic fire. This reveals that the home belongs to the fire god (*agnidevi*), and the householder (*grhastha*) is entrusted with the care of it. *Manu*, in describing the daily duties of the householder, gives the following instruction. It says:

A *brahmana* shall offer, according to the rule (of his *grhya-sutra* a portion) of the cooked food destined for the *vaisva-deva* in the sacred domestic fire to the following deities: first to *agni*, and (next) to *soma*, then to both these gods conjointly, further to all the gods (*visva devah*), and (then) to *dhanvantari*.⁸¹

The domestic fire symbolizes the presence of god in the house. Sacrificial rituals (*samskaras*) take place in the house. For the caste hindus the most important and central part of the house is the "womb-house" (*garbhagṛha*), where the family deity is installed and where worship (*puja*) is offered. Only after taking bath one is supposed to enter this holy of holies. The householder is entrusted with the duty of performing sacrifices to the fire god. The temple is considered to be a sacred place where worship is offered. The sanctity attached to a temple is renowned in all cultures and creeds. The household is a sanctuary where birth and growth take place. The basic education and human maturity are received in the family atmosphere. The

81 *Manu*, III: 84-85.

priests of this temple are the parents. They perform the sacred sacrifices for gods and benefactors. In modern times the situations have very much changed.

The modern household is in a state of crisis. First of all, the sanctity attached to the household is slowly disappearing and, as a consequence the family fabric is breaking up. The purpose for which a household existed in former times, and the ideals cherished therein have been disregarded. Many a household is no longer a temple of worship and a school of learning. As a result, citizens are born with a social deformity which eats away the prosperity and well-being of society. The only remedy for this deformity is to go back to the original purity of household living: traditional values and virtues of the sages and saints whose writings and examples should influence our day today life.

2. 2. 11. Wife (*Sahadharmini*)

In the Indian culture the wife is known as *sahadharmini*. It means one who co-operates with her husband in the execution of *dharma*. The status of women in the family and society is presented in the teaching of *Manu*. "In that family, where the husband is pleased with his wife and the wife with her husband, happiness will assuredly be lasting".⁸² The happiness of the family depends on the good will of the couple. The wife has a vital role to play in the well-being and happiness of the family. The welfare of the family depends very much on the honour given to women. "Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-laws, who desire (their own) welfare. Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards"⁸³. The position and place of women in the family are emphatically expressed in the teaching of *Manu*. In order to please the gods, and to obtain the reward for the observance of the sacred rites, the woman is to be held in honour. Furthermore, *Manu* exhorts the couple to be faithful in mutual relationship. "Let mutual fidelity continue until death. This may be considered a summary of the highest law for husband and wife"⁸⁴.

82 *Manu*, III. 60,

83 *Manu* III: 55-56.

84 *Manu* IX. 101.

A husband without a wife is not complete. Without a wife he has no right to offer sacrifice and follow the dictates of *dharma*. Wife has to be present in all official acts of *dharma* of the husband. That is why she is called *sahadharmini*. *Manu* teaches the position of women in the household: "women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-laws, who desire (their own) welfare. Hence men who seek (their own welfare) should always honour women on holidays and festivals with (gifts of) ornaments, clothes, and (dainty) food"⁸⁵. The Vedic and Upaniṣadic scriptures also express the position and honour which are due to women in the household. The place woman has in the family certainly makes its impact on the social realm, because the family is the basic unit of the society. Any weakness in family life affects society also. Very often, the crumbling of families is due to the lack of mutual fidelity and trust between husbands and wives.

Conclusion

In this study a brief analysis has been made on the family in the multireligious context of India. Major religions in India, like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, have contributed much to the Christian families and these religions have taken much from Christianity. The socio-familial structure of Hinduism has its basis in the four stages of life namely, the four *asramas*. A short exposition of the four *asramas* sets the background of family life in India. Among the four *asramas* the superiority of *grhastha*-*asrama* is explained at length while dealing with the theology of *Grhastha*. Let us pray and hope that the observance of 1994 as an international year of the family will bring out the desired fruit for all families. May families and the values of family life stand to the test of time and proclaim to the world the purpose for which the family is instituted — the glory of God, the founder of families.

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85 *Manu*, III: 55. 59.

A Theology of Marital Sexuality and Love

Conjugal love, the two-in-oneness of the married partners is not just one purpose of marriage, but is its very core. The special emphasis which today's positive as well as systematic theology of marriage gives to conjugal love is not only scriptural but also in accord with the magisterium especially with the teaching of II Vatican Council. In view of preserving the holiness and the natural dignity of marital life, Vatican II introduced the concept of a covenant relationship between the married couple. This stress on the community of love and covenant relationship leads to a positive view of marital sexuality. It is not the outcome of human lust which is tolerated, but is a beautiful arrangement made by God himself to enable married persons to express their mutual love and love of God; it is a sacred act which is both a source of grace and an act of virtue.

Introduction

The point of departure for Christian thinking about marriage today should be the aspect of mutual love and faithfulness. This is what positive theology of marriage as well as systematic theology of marriage seems to point to.

I. Marriage in Positive Theology

A Marriage in Scripture

In the Bible woman is principally considered an aid to man and *vice versa*. Right at the very beginning of God's revelation to the human we find two accounts which summarize the plan of God regarding man and woman. The account given in the second chapter of Genesis is the older of the two traditions, known as the Yahwist, and dates from the tenth century B. C. "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18).

The second account, given in the first chapter of Genesis, the priestly narrative, written some five centuries later, supplements Yahwist description with distinctive additions. The first account was concerned with Eve essentially as a suitable companion for Adam and stressed the polarity of orientation which was directed towards love and fusion. Here there is the description of the creation of the human in the image of God, and is added that God created them man and woman. He presents them as man and woman, and gives them the direction: "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1: 28). Here a further purpose is expressed, to be fruitful and to multiply, which is given to them as a blessing, not as a command. So, according to the Scriptures the main reason for the existence of man and woman is companionship.

Conjugal love as the core of marriage is in accord with the consistent use throughout holy Scripture of marital love and marital union to describe the relationship of God to his people, of Christ to the Church.

The emphasis which contemporary theology places on conjugal love is, thus, essentially as old as divine revelation.

B. Marriage in the Magisterium

It is noteworthy that Vatican II never uses the term contract while speaking of marriage. Covenant is the key to the understanding of the Christian perspectives of marriage. The different phrases used by Vatican II for the marital relations spell out in some way this central notion: a "community of love" (GS 47), an "intimate partnership of married life and love" (GS 48), and "the marriage covenant of conjugal love" (GS 48). Marriage is a participation in the covenant between Christ and the Church. It resembles "the covenant of love and fidelity through which God of old made himself present to his people" (GS 48).

Pre-Vatican theology stressed the contract element of marriage with its rights and duties. Now the accent is on its personal aspects as "partnership of life and love stemming from the human act by which the partners mutually surrender themselves to each other". True, the legal aspect of contract has its place in the framework of marriage; but it is not considered as the foundation of the indissolubility and exclusiveness of marriage.

Such a foundation is the fullness and depth of the personal commitment of the marriage partners.

While considering the purpose of marriage the Council further develops the idea of marriage as a covenant. Married love is spoken of before procreation. Marriage is a total involvement. It "embraces the good of the whole person". It covers all spheres of life and is "a free and mutual giving of self, experienced in tenderness and action, and permeates their whole lives". This loving dedication has its full expression in sexual union which "fosters the self-giving it signifies, and enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude".

When Vatican II defined marriage as a community of love it effectively endorsed the view of those theologians who claimed that love was not something to be forced in among the so-called secondary purposes of marriage. The community of love, the two-in-oneness of the partners is not just one purpose of marriage; it is the very essence of the marriage institution. This is what marriage is in its own right before *being for* anything else.

C. Marriage in Tradition

The Catholic concepts of marriage have probably changed more in the past eighty years than they had in the previous nineteen centuries. Two human factors have contributed greatly to this change. First, laymen and women experienced in the realities of marriage have contributed a new empirical dimension to our thought; secondly, we have experienced a growing awareness of the human person, of his dignity and integrity.

When we try to see the human person in total perspective we realize that the predominant force which vitalizes and integrates his true growth is love. As a person he/she needs to love and to be loved; he/she must give love generously and receive it with confidence. And this love must be interpersonal, whether between human persons, or with God. Without this giving and receiving of personal love human growth is stunted.

Love was the basis of sanctity in the ancient law of Moses: Love of God and love of fellow human beings. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,

and with all your might" (Deut 6: 4-5). "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev 19:18b).

Love was stressed most forcibly by Jesus Christ in his word and example, and the early Christians seem to have understood it and practised it. The world recognized them by their love for one another.

But somewhere in the early centuries of Christianity this vivid awareness of the sanctifying force of interpersonal love seems to have been lost. And nowhere in Christian society did interpersonal love seem to play a less important and less sanctifying role than in marriage. Catholic teachings about marriage, from the fifth century to the fifteenth, and even to our own time, were dominated by the doctrine of Augustine. For him the love between husband and wife involved too much concupiscence to be sanctifying. Indeed this love could hardly be expressed at all without some measure of sin. Only procreation justified intercourse.

Our modern appreciation of the positive value of sexual love in marriage probably finds its first solid base in the moral theology of Alphonsus Liguori, who lived during most of the eighteenth century.

As early as 1850 Ferdinand Probst had written in his *Katholische Moraltheologie*: "This union is bound to remain the basis of marriage... this union finds its highest expression in the marriage act. This gives us reason for saying that the principal purpose of marriage is undivided community of life" (In Doms, *Vom Sinn und Zweck der Ehe*, 1935, p. xix).

In 1878 F.X. Linsermann wrote in his *Lehrbuch der Moraltheologie*: "From the subjective point of view the child is only a secondary purpose of marriage. If it were the first purpose, we should be right in forbidding married people to have sexual intercourse when they could no longer hope to have children..." (Ibid.).

And in 1905 Anton Koch in his *Lehrbuch der Moraltheologie* added: "It is reasonable to suppose that the purpose of marriage is a sexual community ordained to quieten concupiscence and produce children. But the highest and principal purpose of marriage is undivided community of life between a man and a woman" (Ibid.).

Modern thinking on marriage really began with Dietrich von Hildebrand, the first married layman to be accepted as an authority on the subject of Catholic marriage. About 1925 he began to teach and write on the positive value of marital intercourse for husband and wife as an expression and fulfilment of their love for each other.

Von Hildebrand said that the primary meaning of marriage is love. The reason for getting married is to live in love just as the reason for being born is to exist humanly. The meaning of marriage, its reason for existing, is the partners' building of and living in a community of love. He interpreted the biblical "... and the two shall become one flesh" to refer to this communion. The social function of marriage and its importance for civil society and the state are secondary and are subordinate to the experiencing of the community of love. They exist to serve this community; it does not exist to serve them (*Die Ehe*).

Much of what Doms was to say later was at least suggested in an essay written in 1933 by the Franciscan Fidelis Schwendinger: "If we consider the psychological process which leads to marriage (falling in love etc.), we must see that community of life is the first thing which the man and the woman desire ... The Me-You community still remains the first thing when one looks at marriage objectively. The first thing that husband and wife want to do is not to create a third thing distinct from either. The third person is not that which unites them and makes them say 'We' nor do they fulfil and consummate each other through it. No, the first and the most obvious characteristic of marriage is the direct union in love between a Me and a You. The object of their desire is *the whole person*. And when marriage is consummated each person gives and receives *an entire personality*. And this complete giving of the whole of a person to a person is for both human beings concerned the primary value and meaning of marriage union" (Ibid., pp. 20-21).

A couple of years later, Herbert Doms, a priest, scientist, philosopher and theologian, gave a sound theological basis to the ideas of Hildebrand and Schwendinger and pointed out the biological errors which had distorted earlier evaluation of the sexual act. He also enriched the concept of marital relationship

by viewing it in the light of personalism: a giving of one person to another, the fulfilment of one person in another, the spiritual giving of self in joy, love, and abandonment.

These ideas did not meet with immediate acceptance, but about thirty years later the Fathers of Vatican II endorsed them.

II. Marriage in Systematic Theology

A. Marriage as covenant of love between spouses

The first millennium of the Church revered marriage as a covenant. Later on only marriage came to be considered in terms of contract.

a. Nature of covenant

1. *Difference between contract and covenant*

A covenant springs from the solemn agreement between people, parties or individuals, ushering in a binding and inviolable relationship. Covenant is founded on mutual trust and fidelity. It cannot be broken but can only be violated by infidelity. A contract, on the other hand, can be broken by the mutual agreement of the parties concerned or by the intervention of the civil authority or by the failure of the parties to abide by the conditions of the contract.

A contract concerns itself with things; a covenant with people. Contracts are associated with services while covenants with persons. Contracts are time-bound while covenants are eternal. The breaking of contracts produces material loss for the parties; the violation of covenant produces heartbreak and personal loss. Contracts may be said to be secular, while covenants are sacred. Contracts belong to the domain of lawyers, whereas covenants to that of poets and sages. Human beings are the guarantors of contracts while God is the guarantor of covenants. Even children, provided they understand the value of money can enter into contracts whereas only mature persons can enter into covenants.

2. *Christian marriage as graced covenant*

The mere covenant idea does not express adequately the concept of Christian marriage. Even the ancient Romans considered marriage as a covenant. Neither does the understanding

of marriage as symbolizing the covenant between Christ and the Church bring out its full significance. Christian marriage is an admirable reality mainly for the reason that it shares in the Christ-Church covenant.

Vatican II, besides stating that marriage is "a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ with the Church" adds that it is "a participation in that covenant". This alludes to something more than the sacramental nature of marriage. The grace of marriage is a covenant grace inasmuch as it is a participation in the grace that brings Christ and the Church together. The Council of Trent describes this covenant grace as one that "perfects natural love, strengthens the indissoluble unity, and sanctifies the spouses". Married Christians are introduced to Christ's covenant by baptism and a fuller participation in that covenant is achieved through the sacrament of marriage.

b. Marriage as vocation to love

The richest value of marriage is not instrumental. It is not an institution whose greatest value is in gaining some goal outside itself, such as the continuing of the human race and the prolonging of civil or ecclesiastical societies. It can and does serve these goals. But it is itself a community of persons with a meaning and therefore a value. It is two persons *becoming one* (Doms called this *Zweieinigkeit*, two-in-oneness), the creating of the I-Thou in which a man and a woman are brought to completion as human beings. This is the first value and meaning in marriage — the *raison d'être* of marriage as distinct and even separable from procreation.

When we look at marriage in relation to Christianity, we realize that love must be the foundation of every marriage. None is more entitled to be called one's neighbour than the man or the woman with whom one plans to share one's entire life; none is, therefore, more entitled to one's love.

c. Marriage as the total fulfilment of heterosexual complementarity

Human nature taken as a whole is to be found neither in man alone, nor in woman alone, but in both together. The nostalgic dream of a human nature totally embodied within one single being was expressed with highly evocative poetic power

by certain Greek myths. In his *Banquet* Plato surmises how at the beginning of time the earth was peopled with androgynes, man-woman creatures, spherical in shape, having four arms, four legs, two heads and two sexes. These creatures attained so high a degree of happiness and power that the gods took offence and Zeus loosed a thunderbolt which cleaved in half these too perfect bodies. So was born our humanity, thereafter to be wretched and unsatisfied, hungering for a lost and vaguely remembered felicity. Each of us, born as one half of a being once undivided, spends his or her years in a yearning search for the lost half, and this is the mystery of sex, love and marriage.

The above myth expresses the idea that man and woman are complementary, that is to say, differing in many respects but fundamentally one and needing each other. Because every human being is compelled to consider him/herself as endowed with sexuality, the sense of incompleteness is there, as is also the awareness of the inability to realize alone the fullness of life's experience. To have sex and to acknowledge that one has sex is to accept oneself as incomplete.

Man is oriented towards woman and woman towards man. Although each of them possesses human nature, it can be said that, in a certain sense, neither of them possesses it completely. Human nature is complete in all its aspects only in the human couple. This is the basis of marriage. This sense of unfulfilment is what sends the human being in quest of a complementary partner to be found through dialogue with the opposite sex. The whole mystery of love and marriage lies in the possibility that couples have to recreate unity out of their distinct individualities.

Fundamentally, therefore, marriage is based on the existence of the human male and female as incomplete. From the basic fact that we are incomplete, we will understand how this reality of man and woman should be realized.

B. Marriage as Covenant of Love between Spouses and God

a. Marriage as a sacred vocation

Till recently only choices for priestly and religious life were given the title of vocation. Those who married were supposed

to have no vocation. Those who opted for marriage after having tried for priesthood or religious life were said to have lost their vocation. This way of thinking is unacceptable. Marriage too is a vocation. While God calls a few to the state of celibacy, he calls most of his children to the state of marriage. It is God who directs the feet of the aspirants of marriage to the doors of the other partner and finally to the marriage altar.

Marriage, then, is a vocation, a call from God to serve him and to attain perfection in a particular state of life, with specific duties, responsibilities and privileges. Marriage is also a sacred vocation, not merely permitted or tolerated by God but willed and blessed by him from the beginning. It was not an afterthought that he formed Eve from Adam and presented her to him as wife and helpmate. From all eternity God had planned the institution of marriage. How could such an institution be other than holy?

b. Marriage as a natural sacrament

Besides being a vocation, marriage is also a sacrament. Till recently the term sacrament covered only the restricted range of the seven principal rites of sanctification and worship. We have become used to the classical definition of a sacrament as an outward sign of inward grace or as the visible sign of invisible grace, to which is given the power of making holy (DS 1639).

Present-day theology assigns a wider scope to this term. In the larger understanding of it, every event that occasions encounter with God is a sacrament. It can be any event or aspect of human life that reveals God. The Bible insists that no one has ever seen, nor can anyone see God and live. Yet this invisible, unattainable God is behind every event of human life. The Unapproachable knocks at our doors; the Invisible closes in on us; the Unknowable lights up before us in the sacraments.

Even the pre-Christians considered marriage as a sacrament in this larger sense. The Israelites of old, besides Hindus and Buddhists and others accorded a special sacredness to marriage.

1. *Sacramentality of marital sexuality*

It may be surprising to hear that the sexual union of spouses can be sacramental. In fact, the sacramental implications

of marriage are nowhere more profoundly expressed than in this union. Unfortunately, owing to various negative influences such as that of a defective upbringing loaded with false attitudes toward sex, most married couples do not seem to experience the sacramentality of their love-making. They may hardly be able to recall any instance when their sexual experience triggered a spiritual experience. Worse still is the tragedy of many married people to whom the God-ordained married love seems shameful, degrading and even productive of guilt.

Conjugal intimacy is not something invented by man's lust and tolerated by God. It has been designed by God himself so as to enable two persons whom he has joined for life to express their mutual love and glorify him in their bodies. The Holy Spirit is present in every act of true love, even in the ecstatic consummation of the conjugal union.

Man's sexual relationship with wife provides an experience of love which gives them an inkling of the love God has for them. The starting point of all Christian life is the reality of our belonging to Christ. Paul puts it to the Corinthians this way: "You are not your own you were bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:19-20).

Being ontologically — though sacramentally — united to Christ, the principle of our life is the same as that of Christ himself. Our actions are at the same time our own actions as well as those of Christ. Christ is not merely the moral authority for us nor the teacher of righteousness. He is the very principle of our life and activity. We share in the living reality of Christ and are united with him as branches are united to the vine (Jn 15:1-5). We achieve a mystical identity with him so that we can say with Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

The sacramentality of marital sexuality is to be understood in this perspective. Here is an example which has nothing to do with sex. Walking down the hill one day, you see someone who is depressed. You are inspired to smile at that person. Whether you are aware or not, your smile is yours as well as God's. When you smile, your smile is literally both human and divine. The person you smile at is being smiled at by God too. When you smile God too is smiling in you.

This is what graced action means: it is one and the same action which is both God's personal act and a human personal act. There are not two acts of love, one human and the other divine that blend. There is just one act of love expressed in one smile, and the reality of this loving smile is both human and divine. God and you each share in what the other does.

Applying this understanding to marital intimacy, it becomes clear how it is both human and divine. The awesome thing about Christian sexual expression is that God is expressing himself in what Christians do. In the playfulness, the teasing, the sexiness of sex, God also is expressing himself. Every sexual encounter between married couples is a mystery both human and divine.

God gives to each partner in marriage the power to speak for him. In every gesture and word through which married couples say to one another, "You are precious to me; you are beautiful and loved; you are my delight" God is speaking.

It is not that one has to be married in order for God to express his love to another through that one. But one has to be married in order to express love to another with that depth of meaning and intensity of passion which sexual intercourse conveys. What God gives to each member of marriage is the power to speak for him in this way.

Conjugal intimacy is sacramental. In it God is saying to both man and wife whatever each is saying to the other. Conjugal intimacy within the sacrament of marriage is a visible sign instituted by Christ to give grace. The favour of union which it immediately brings about is union between the two spouses. But since within each one is the life of God, when they communicate themselves to each other, they also communicate God.

2. Integrating sexuality and spirituality

The average Christian has an especially hard time in seeking to integrate his sexuality with his spiritual life. The main reason for this is that the tensions he experiences in his sexuality seem to tally with "the lusts of the flesh" described by Paul. If he is guided by the Spirit, he can hardly "gratify the desires of the flesh". For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh (Gal 5: 16-17).

Many Christians believe that their sexuality is nature's strongest competitor of their loyalty to God. "You cannot love both God and sex", they argue. Christian commitment, seemingly, places them on the side of God against their sex. The fact that sexuality needs so much of control is enough proof that it is a threat to Christian life, a threat percolating from the dark abyss of fallen human nature.

The total way in which two people get involved with each other in sexual experience is a symbol of the way in which we can be intensely involved with God. The concept that sexual union is an example of the way God would like to relate to humankind is developed throughout the OT. The OT frequently refers to Israel as God's bride. In Jeremiah 7:9 and 23:10, the term "adultery" is used to describe Israel's sin of worshipping other gods. Ezekiel 16 talks in great detail of how God's grace was demonstrated to unfaithful Jerusalem. It talks in symbolic terms of a lover preparing his bride. The passage refers to bathing, oiling, clothing, adorning her and she becomes an adulterous wife who takes strangers instead of her husband (v. 32). The entire Book of Hosea is an account of God's relationship with Israel, his bride.

The sexual symbolism in the NT describes the Church as Christ's bride. We find the most explicit passage for this symbolism in Ephesians 5: 21-25. Paul keeps interweaving the relationship of husband and wife with the relationship of Christ and the Church.

The whole passage is basically saying that the sexual relationship is what best symbolizes the relationship between Christ and the Church. This symbolism is telling us that there is something more to sexuality than physical release, since our sexual relationship is a model of how we can best understand God's desire to have an intense relationship with us.

We have a few official statements of the Church regarding the religious dimension of sexuality. Pope Pius XII once said that man's sexual orientation towards another is the imprint on the instinctual level of his ontological relationship to the transcendent Other.

In a pastoral letter the hierarchy of Ireland stated: "Sexuality is, indeed, an area in which man experiences new heights in

his existence and realizes in wonder his longing for the infinite. Even at the level of human experience, sexual love can be an intimation of the nature of God who is love. The language of sexual love has indeed been used by God himself in the Bible as an analogy for his relations with people whom he loves. Sexual love puts men in touch with the mystery of life and creation; and the experience of parenthood and of filial love can be intimations of our relationship with God our Father." (Cf. *Doctrine and Life*, 25(1975) p. 911)

From the primitive times humanity has recognized the connection between sexual experience and religious experience. Mystics have traditionally expressed their experience in the language of sexual love. Lovers, on the other hand, have often said that they felt themselves "divinized" by their love and have found in each other an experience of illumination that verged on the mystical. There is no point in blinking the fact that the raptures of the mystic are closely akin to the transports of sexual union, the soul, as it were, playing the part of the female and God appearing as male. The close parallel may seem, blasphemous to some. Yet the blasphemy is not in the comparison, but in the degrading of the one act that makes the human like God both in the intensity of his/her union with his/her partner and in the fact that this union renders him/her co-creator with God. In fact, if we look at the matter dispassionately, we can just as easily say that sensual passion is a form of mystical experience as that mystical passion is a form of sexual experience. Either statement has an element of truth, and neither is wholly true. One kind of experience cannot be regarded simply as a form of the other. Yet they are closely linked.]

There is ecstasy in both sexual and mystical experiences. Ecstasy is a standing outside of self. It is being overwhelmed by the beauty, truth and goodness of another. It is being surprised and pleased by the insights into the depth dimensions of the loved one. It is being filled to overflowing. This occurs in meaningful sex. The ecstasy of direct loving encounter with God and that of spontaneous sexual release in spousal love are truly a standing outside of self.

In conjugal intimacy the ego, as it were, vanishes. A state of transitory egolessness comes into being. For a moment one

does not remember self. Similarly for a moment time is out and timelessness is in with no past or future but only the present. Accordingly a glimpse of eternity ensues.

In other words, conjugal intimacy is a launching pad for a transcendental experience in which understanding of the divine is unveiled. There is in marital intimacy the ultimate outgoing of the human from himself or herself into the waiting depths of being. He or she descends and plunges into the world "beneath" and "above" himself or herself, into the breath of the morning of creation and into the dawn of being. It is the moment where in awe-struck trembling life transcends its limits. It is the mystery of a sudden merging and union into a single, indivisible being of flesh and spirit, of heaven and earth, of human love and divine. The divine Spirit touches the human flesh in the burning moment of erotic ecstasy. The couple are witnessing to a true sacrament; the Spirit of God invades the cosmic element, without ceasing to be Spirit, and the flesh widens into the transcendence of the Spirit, without ceasing to be flesh.

Hence our sexual unfolding is a story of transcendence. Beneath the sexual is the search for the divine. The sexual restlessness of our hearts is a thirst for the presence of the other and ultimately for the presence of the Divine. Our sexual stories disclose to us that our sexual emergence is also spiritual emergence. In other words, God is communion and bliss par excellence. Sexuality is thirst for communion and bliss. Thus sexuality is ultimately thirst for God.

3. *Conjugal intimacy as Act of virtue*

Lust does not exhaust the species of sexual behaviour in marriage. Most celibates who usually write on these matters know what lust is, but not many are aware of what sexual exchange means for loving spouses. Narrow-minded counsellors may declare that such a material union as conjugal intimacy can have no spiritual value whatsoever. They may advise spouses to abstain from it in favour of devotion. They may piously suggest that good Christian couples would do better to pray together, meditate together on some holy topic or read some edifying book any of which would in their opinion be much more virtuous than making love. In this they are dead wrong.

There is nothing related to the human that has not the possibility of giving glory to God and there is no activity which cannot be a meeting ground for God and the human. The relative merit of an action is founded on its content of true love rather than on its content of spirituality. There is then as much of the "spiritual", if not more, in making love rightly as there is in engaging in some exercises of devotion.

The act of sex for married people has a very high place in God's plan. God not only permits this union but he wills it. He not only allows two people to be joined together, he joins them together. And he joins them in this particular manner and in no other; he approves of their union; he wants it.

Viewed in this perspective it will be easy to recognize that conjugal intimacy is a sacred act which induces grace in the married couple. By this God-ordained union the partners in marriage give themselves to each other. They offer to God an act of worship which he has made worthy of this acceptance. The total self-offering of two people to God in the union that he has blessed, can lead to a liberation of the spirit, a joyful freedom of love.

Not everything done with the body is sinful as some heretics believed. Perfection does not consist in the exaltation of the spirit at the expense of the body nor in that of the body at the expense of the spirit, but in a conscious and disciplined attempt to mend the broken order by letting each faculty play the part originally assigned to it. We have to accept the body unequivocally as one of the central and most appropriate means of expressing love. The doubts, hostilities and anxieties surrounding the physical expression of sexuality do not belong to the revealed truth about man and woman.

There is the objection from certain quarters that conjugal intimacy is opposed to the virtue of self-control for it is yielding to passion. In reply we grant that there is an element of compulsion in marital relations. It is not just that the partners wish to show their love and celebrate and give pleasure to each other, but they feel they must have intercourse, that the tension is too great without; and in the conduct of it there is usually some element of engrossment and consequently an ingredient of selfishness.

But the selfishness lies not in the enjoyment of pleasure, but in the absorption in one's own enjoyment. An example to clarify this point. Suppose a woman prepares a special meal in celebration of a wedding anniversary. Naturally, for the success of the celebration she wants her husband to enjoy the meal. But if a glazed look comes into his eyes and he becomes utterly absorbed in savouring each mouthful, quivering with excitement at each taste and impatient at all attempts at sociability, there is lack of self-control. It is not the degree of pleasure that makes it an act of indulgence, but the self-engrossed form of it. Similarly in sexual intercourse. It is not the enjoyment of pleasure that makes sexual intercourse an act of indulgence, but the self-engrossed form of enjoying it. If, for instance, a husband were carried away by passion, were withdrawn from the shared celebratory side of the act, were unmindful of the aspect of his making a free gift of self in love, and were engrossed in his own pleasure, he would certainly be losing self-control in the act of intercourse. So we see that enjoyment of pleasure and self-control are compatible. What is incompatible is selfish enjoyment of pleasure and self-control.

The control which comes with conjugal chastity is an aspect of growth of love and diminution of selfishness in the relations between husband and wife in their life generally. The result is that intercourse becomes more fully and genuinely an expression of their love for each other, and of their acceptance of God's calling. In short, intercourse leads to self-control and chastity by leading to a development of sexual love, and so enabling sexual intercourse to become a fully free expression of the love of the partners for each other and for God (J. Gosling, *Marriage and the Love of God*, St. Meinrad, 1968, pp. 94-99).

The primary aspect of sacrifice is not denial, or giving up, but devotion, or giving to; self-control does not consist in restraining oneself from doing what emotion would lead one to do. Control in marriage does not mean that a partner will refrain from intercourse; it means that intercourse will be an expression of love. When the instinct of sex is penetrated by the force of love there is sexual control.

4. *Ascetical dimensions of conjugal intimacy*

Most unmarried persons suffer from what is called "virginal misconception". They seem to think that every meeting of man and wife automatically results in earthshaking sensuous pleasure so embarrassingly strong that it needs to be restrained. They tend to suppose that the sexual impulse, once stimulated, is simple and strong, that sexual act is easy in marriage, and that sexual pleasure in married life is natural and almost automatic. The image is of water held in check by a dam, or horses reined in by a driver. However, the story told by married people is quite different: Sexual love is difficult. It demands control, concern for the other, waiting and helping, prolonged tenderness, searching to discover and respect the feelings of the other. There is a whole asceticism in the enjoyment of marriage of which the unmarried know practically nothing at all.

Sex is not absolute bliss, as it would appear to the readers of cheap magazines. The story in these magazines generally runs as follows: Boy meets girl and falls in love. Something comes up to hold them apart. Obstacle is removed, and they make love in a state of delirious ecstasy forever thereafter.

These are but fairy tales for the consolations of the frustrated but they are harmful in that they convey an utterly erroneous idea of physical love by presenting it as an adequate means of perfect and eternal pleasure. In fact, when two incompletely prepared young people enter the state of matrimony, bitter disillusion may be the first thing to strike even before the honeymoon is over, for marriage is not all "taking" and having fun. There is a lot more to it and most of it is "giving".

Sex is not automatic pleasure. Several obstacles have to be overcome before sex can be enjoyed to the full in marriage. In the first place, because of the prejudice of shame, many couples of good will are reluctant to approach the mystery of sex with the same objective simplicity as they might any other mystery. Many husbands and wives are victims of the age-long negative teaching on sex. They have been taught from early childhood by well-intentioned parents that sex is something of "animal instinct", that sex is "not nice", but shameful, degrading and even sinful. Love-making which a benevolent God

wanted them to enjoy somehow seems to be contaminated. It leaves them with a sense of shame and guilt. They may know better in their minds; yet this false sense has been inculcated so deeply that it still holds them in its clutches. Consequently, they just can't "let themselves go" in love-making.

Secondly, often the right physical setting for the game of love is a far cry. In our modern world, especially in the third world countries, housing and furniture are too poorly adapted to sexual intimacies between husbands and wives. Dwellings are so inconvenient and crowding in cities and towns so universal that every move and whisper of lovers become common property and a potential source of gossip.

While love nests are built for illegitimate meetings, the married are not provided with surroundings conducive to the lyrical expressions of their young love. Often the spouses have to confine their sexual life to total darkness, dead silence and a few functional spasms—which seem to be the limit of what contemporary housing facilities generally allow.

Selfishness is to be overcome if sexuality is to be enjoyed. The most perfect encounters are those of two freedoms, so deeply respectful of each other that there is no demand on either side, but a mutual desire and a mutual offering of the means of joy. Sexual union will be the more satisfying as each partner becomes the less concerned with self and the more concerned about the other, as each seeks the more to give one's self, body and soul, to the other than to receive. The conjugal act should not be a seeking to fill one's own void, one's need for tenderness; nor a search for release from the hard drives of life, nor much less a passing self-gratification. It should be the meeting of two persons who know what they mean to each other, who give themselves to each other in intense desire for each other's happiness. All this calls for a high degree of self-denial which few are privy to.

In this perspective, with the pains and labours of life sapping the energies of both partners, sexual pleasure seems to be an elusive reality. Many a devoted and virtuous couple, instead of being warned to restrain, should be helped in all possible ways to enjoy the pleasures of their state so flippantly despised by

unenlightened counsellors. In the life of a couple fully dedicated to God through constant care for the family that needs their love, the simple fact of man and wife being together, alone and untired, in the proper surrounding and mood and at the proper time, seems an almost unattainable ideal.

No genital relationship in marriage, however satisfying it might be, eliminates all the free-floating sexual desires and hunger of the partners. There may be plenty of sexual hunger for third parties in the lives of husbands and wives despite their fundamentally happy marriages. Celibates who assume that marriage eliminates sexual hunger for third parties and solves all sexual problems are sadly mistaken. Restraint, self-control, and sublimation are part of the human condition whether married or unmarried. Celibates miss the whole point when they think that they are the only ones who must practise them—or even that their practice is appreciably easier for married persons than it is for them.

Even the most intense and voluptuous experience of conjugal intimacy is rather ambivalent and consequently somewhat disappointing. On completion of the sexual act, the nostalgic longing for what cannot be attained — a total and "interior" presence to the beloved — is never absent.

Very few unmarried persons suspect sexual boredom in married life. Yet such boredom is one of the strongest factors operating against marriage and is probably at the root of most marital breakdowns. The thirst for new sexual experiences seems to be one aspect of a general need for novelty and freshness that is built in to the human biological nature. As we ascend the evolutionary scale through mammals and primates, there is an increasing exploratory drive. A desire for novel experience of all kinds seems to be an innate characteristic of the human. It is not difficult to understand that lifelong fidelity in marriage isn't as easy as many celibates think. In fact, it is a hard-won moral victory.

When marital sexuality is weeded out of all its exaggerated romanticism and reconstructed in its true reality, it becomes an important and valuable part of spiritual life. In the sexual flowering of marriage there is solid and substantial food for the spiritual maturation of spouses.

This reality is brought about even when God is not explicitly or systematically involved in the human love. The structure of marriage itself, when it is lived with sincerity, naturally embodies permanent reference to and inclusion of God.

5. *Conjugal love as experience of God*

Simple reflection on the experience of conjugal love reveals that it has a dimension which reaches out beyond the persons concerned to include God.

Selfishness thins off in proportion to the nobility of our values. Search after values that engender emotional happiness has less of self in it than search after material values. Thus an effort to cultivate friendship or arts involves less ego in it than the quest after good food, physical comforts, and the like. Pursuit of higher values detaches us from trivialities, releases us from undue preoccupation with self and introduces us to the sphere of sublime objectives. The profound union of love that is achieved in marriage destroys undue attachment to things. Love for the better half does away with petty ties to transitory goods such as show, pomp, possessions and the like. The mutually committed and unreserved love of the married partners introduces them to the profundities of the human spirit. The wealth of fullness and contentment that ensues from deep conjugal love frees their hearts from concentrating on dinner tables, light past times, and so on and elevates them to God. One who has tasted the joy of marital love, willingly renounces the minor attractions of life. Thus the quest after the highest earthly value of conjugal love brings the couple closer to God.

God is love (1 Jn 4: 8, 16). He is a community of persons. He is intimate, loving and perfect reciprocity. All of human loving is a reflection of the eternal reality of God who is Love. When directed aright, when properly ordered, it becomes what in principle and intention it has always been: a participation in divine Love, made visible and available in this world of space and time.

Every true hunger for love is in the final analysis, a hunger for God. Every individual has a thirst for loving and being loved without restrictions of time and space and without

wear and tear. In every search for love, we are out for LOVE, namely, God. As such every quest after genuine love is at least an implicit search for God.

Love for the partner includes love for God. God is at the basis of its being. God is the one "in whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Accordingly we cannot think of a person in his or her totality without the Absolute being included in his or her horizon. Hence to love the partner is to love God as well.

True conjugal love implies unconditional surrender of self to the beloved. In conjugal love one makes an unlimited commitment of self to the other and accepts the other's reciprocal unlimited commitment. However, unlimited commitment can be made only to God and this fact introduces the Divine into human loving.

In love, the other always remains a mystery. An unfathomable mystery is present even in a total and unreserved encounter of man and wife.

We are, for weal or woe, finite creatures. No love, however permanent or powerful, can make us more than finite. We may occasionally break through the boundaries of our finitude in moments of ecstasy during mystic contemplation or at the height of sexual arousal. Nevertheless, they are fleeting, and we find ourselves all too quickly alone again, cut off, isolated. Genital love even at its most rewarding instance, doesn't eliminate finitude. It may alleviate the pain and isolation of finitude and that is all that can be asked of it. Even the most ecstatic of experiences still leaves one lonely because it still leaves one finite. During such experiences one feels most poignantly one's hunger for the Infinite. That there is an Infinite, incidentally, does not seem to be a matter of doubt during or immediately after moments of ecstasy.

6. *Family life as spiritual experience*

In the words of Louis Bouyer, if a marriage is to be more than the superficial and basically discordant association of two egoisms, there must be included in the possession of the other

person, a radical dispossession of self. For a man thus to unite his life, his being, to another life, to another human being, is to communicate all that he has, all that he is. The giving up of all one's own body and, finally, of one's own will, which is at the basis of the monastic profession is, in a certain way, equally at the basis of the marriage pact. The husband who understands this Christian meaning of his marriage knows well that he no longer has anything which he can call exclusively his own. Another person possesses together with him all that is his. He can dispose freely of none of his goods- material, cultural or even spiritual. His own body is no longer his own; he cannot expect to receive even those joys to which marriage gives him full right unless he also gives them. More generally, he can no longer dispose of his existence, his time; he can no longer choose any of his occupations merely according to his own will. At every moment his will must go out of itself to make room for the will of another person. Thus every generous marriage requires a continual self-renouncement, a continual relinquishing of self.

Obviously, this requirement will be increased by the inevitable imperfections of each of the two persons, the dissonances which cannot help entering into their most profound harmony. Even when you love and are loved as greatly as you wish, the other person remains other. This is enough to impose an unremitting sacrifice of self to the person to whom you are bound. Furthermore, in the conditions in which sinful humanity finds itself, otherness is inevitably coloured with some hostility. There is no union so well matched as not to include many conflicts about details, many unresolved and probably unresolvable tensions, and finally, a greater or lesser degree of mutual incomprehension and mutual dissatisfaction. Unless this is to lead to a break-up, you must know how to accept all this and to integrate it positively into your life. What more abundant source of ever new sacrifices?

It is by reason of all this that marriage lends itself to being a school of faith and charity which, if we have the humility to accept all its teachings, can certainly lead to God-experience (Louis Bouyer, introduction to *Spirituality*, Collegeville, 1961, pp. 171-175).

c. Marriage as a Christian Sacrament.

Every religion attributes to marriage a sacral character. In the Church, marriage receives the status of a Christian sacrament.

Christ did not institute a sacramental sign proper to matrimony, but built on marriage as it existed, restoring its original human dimension. Christian marriage is like other marriages in its structure and pattern of organization. But it is lived in a new spirit: Marrying, Paul says, is marrying in the Lord (1 Cor 7:39). The Christian couple promise to love each other as Christ loves them. A man's love for his wife is to resemble Christ's love for the Church and a wife's love for her husband is to resemble the Church's love for Christ.

Christian marriage is a sharing in the love which Christ and the Church have for each other. When the husband provides for his wife, he is sharing in Christ's concern for her. Since she is part of the Church, when he loves and cares for her he is sharing in the love of Christ for the Church. Similarly when the wife who perceives Christ's care for her as mediated through the care of her husband and knows that she is part of the Church, shares in the loving response of the Church to Christ.

Evidently this is a gradual process. The perception and the cultivation of the Christ-Church relationship by the couple is a lifelong programme. When the couple grasp the working of this relationship in themselves and try to make it effective in their life, the function of the sacrament becomes evident. The wife enjoying the Christlike love and care of her husband realizes the quality of Jesus's love and care for her and learns to respond to this love like the Church.

Just as the universal sacrament of the Church knows various degrees of actualization and explicitness, from the atheists in good faith (LG. n. 16) to Catholic Christians in a state of sanctifying grace, so marriage likewise expresses its sacramental character in various ways, from the imperfect but real forms of the world's various civilizations and other

religions, to its perfect and complete form within the Church. This perspective forces us to look with the eyes of faith not only at Christian marriage, but at all validly contracted marriages. All marriage is a sign of the transcendent and an incomplete realization of the mystery of Christ and the Church, moving towards an ever greater explicitation of its religious entelechy and inner Christianity.

Conclusion

Vatican II broke new and decisive ground by describing Christian marriage as an "intimate partnership of married life and love" (GS. 48). The Council sought to emphasize the interpersonal dimension of marriage by linking it specifically to the divine covenant between God and the chosen people, between Christ and the Church. Christian marital partnership creates a covenant between the wife and husband. Yet, this newer formulation is only a first step in forming a more appropriate theology of Christian marriage for our time. It simply creates a new framework which will guide future formulations. With full focus on the persons involved rather than rights or services exchanged, and with stress on the totality of the relationship rather on specific acts, the theology of marriage will become more expansive in nature.

Married people should not look upon their love as the only experience that gives meaning to their lives. They must look upon their love as a door opening upon vast opportunities of dedication and service to each other, to their children, to the Church, to society and above all to God. Their love for each other is not the be-all and end-all of their lives. There is a Love beyond their love which alone can give significance to what they are and what they do. No human can say that his/her life is a success unless his or her human experience brings him or her ultimately to a deeper knowledge and love of God.

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Media and the Family

The media in general and electronic in particular profoundly affect family life, being the primary source of news, views and entertainment. As a result it contributes immensely to the shaping of opinions and attitudes of family members, their patterns of behaviour, their life-style and sense of values. Such tremendous influence of the media calls for the grave responsibility of parents to guide and choose programmes. Entertainments have to be transformed into a shared family experience. Its critical evaluation is necessary and media education programmes have to be conducted at all levels.

Today we speak of a 'new culture' created by modern communications which affect everyone, particularly the younger generation. This is largely the result of technological advances which have created "new ways of communicating with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology"¹. It is in this perspective that we should see the relationship between communication media and the family.

According to Universal Declaration of Human Rights "the family founded on marriage is a unique communion of persons which God has made the natural and fundamental group unit of society"². In this context we see that the modern media have immense power to sustain and strengthen communion within the family as well as solidarity with other families and a spirit of service to society. Psychologists emphatically state that communication is the bridge between persons and the language of this communication is Love. This is especially true of the family where relationship is the very basic quality.

How does communication media affect this basic quality of the family? Do they nurture or weaken relationship?

¹ *Redemptoris Missio*, 37.

² *Universal Decl. of Human Rights*, art. 16, 3,

Do they foster or diminish love in the family? In other words, do they help to transform a house into home?

A television advertisement for a telephone company in America goes as follows: The 'ad' shows a phone ringing. Then an old and withered lady with a walker tries to get to the phone. She struggles hard to cross the room to the ringing phone. The effort takes a very long time. Finally she reaches for the phone, takes it and holds it with shivering hands. A little boy's voice says, "Grandma"? Her face lights up in a very grateful smile. Then the commentator of the ad says, "love waits". Rather than being an advertisement for a phone company, it brings out the beauty of communication within the family. This advertisement touches the human heart and loudly proclaims the need of love in the family.

Role of the media

We should examine in detail whether media truly develop and observe a code of ethics which includes a commitment to serving the needs of families and promoting values supportive of family life. Media are generally classified into a) print media, b) celluloid media and c) electronic media. Of all the three, electronic media, especially television seems to have more influence and impact today on the family. Advent of television has minimised the influence of print media, the popularity of movies and use of radio.

In India as well as the world over, television has set in motion a revolution which has profoundly affected family life. Today it is the primary source of news, information and entertainment for a number of families. As a result, media contribute heavily to the shaping of opinions and attitudes, patterns of behaviour, sense of values as well as life style of the family members. But the effect of television is not all bad. Let us look at it in the background of how families use the other media.

Print media is used by family members on a one-at-a time basis. Usually people go to movies individually or in peer groups. Very rarely does the whole family go to the theatre. Even then, young people find their own company.

But television viewing is a shared family experience. All the members of the family sit together and watch the programmes. It enriches family life. The time spent outside is slowly being cut down and more time is spent inside the house, together with the other members of the family.

Parental guidance

This gives rise to parental responsibility. Formerly, parents could shut their eyes to the content of movies children watch in the theatre or pretend not to see the type of magazines young children read. But watching a programme together at home is different. Pope John Paul II in his letter for this year's World Communications Day says, "parents should actively help to form in their children viewing habits conducive to sound development, human, moral and religious".

Media bring home the whole world. The effects of Kuwait war, the plight of the people of Somalia, the disaster of Lathur, the course of refugees from Cuba, all these make us aware of the world around us. Increased knowledge is the result. It also makes us aware of the needs of our community as well as of the people elsewhere in the world. Slowly television is becoming a substitute for newspapers and even books. Secondly, it has become the major family entertainer. If the whole family sit together and laugh with TV humour, discuss story line or think over the theme of a programme, it is a very healthy interaction. This discussion will result in sound outlook on and evaluation of the people and events. Besides, this interaction will help develop a strong mutual relationship. Moreover, it will provide the elders the opportunity to discuss moral issues and problems, social values and even new vision of life with their children. Thus a good media education takes place within the family.

Influence of media

The tremendous influence of the media on individuals and society makes parental guidance inevitable. The statistics available point in this direction. In India, Doordarshan has

now 13 channels of programmes while foreign invaders of the sky are numerous. Of them, the Star TV network with its four channels and the latest addition of 24 hours movie channel has the largest volume of viewers. It intends to reach 400 million viewers by the year 1996, there by importing alien culture and value system to our country.

Children and young people spend on the average 4 hours a day in front of television. A research study conducted by the BBC media experts says that in America children watch on average 100,000 scenes of TV violence by the time they reach the age of 13. There was even a programme titled "A video guide to suicide" giving graphic details of the ways of committing suicide. Mark Harris, a film and TV critic of England says about American children, "their brain is completely locked into the screen. As a result all their experiences are filtered through popular shows. If they have an emotion they identify it to a similar situation in a particular show". The BBC calls television "the drug of a nation". One in ten children in the US are TV addicts. Hence they have started media education in Schools by analysing characters and situations, acting out scenes and reflecting on themes.

Researches in this field have shown that opinion and attitudes change drastically by regular viewing of particular type of programmes. This influence is observed to be more in intellectually backward people and in those children who lack religious or family guidance and education³.

The negative effects of television on family life are numerous. Primarily it may substitute interpersonal activities like conversation, family prayer and games. Personal study and efforts are also replaced by television. Non-critical and passive acceptance of images and messages from television is another negative effect. Introduction of pornographic and violent images into home is yet another evil. Creation of consumerist and materialistic attitudes seems to be the worst of all.

It is observed that unrealistic approach to life situations and problems depicted in programmes create in young minds

3 Defleur and Dennis, *Understanding Mass Communication*, p. 306.

superfluous approach to life. Individuals taking law and order in their hands, portraying casual sex, lack of respect for human dignity, degrading female sex and prejudice to minorities and weaker sections of the society send wrong signals to untrained minds. People have a tendency to imitate the life style presented in the media. This results in a consumerist culture. Exploitative advertisements in media strongly create in human minds more and more needs which can be filled only with unlimited availability of money. This will result in frustration and strain in family relations:

Creative use of the media

Television has provided the opportunity to transform entertainment into a shared family experience. In that context, Pope John Paul II says, "parents should inform themselves in advance about programme content and make a conscious choice on that basis for the good of the family"⁴. He advises that parents should also discuss television with the children, guiding them to regulate the amount and quality of viewing and to perceive and judge the ethical values underlying particular programmes.

It has to be noted that constant viewing of programmes will develop a kind of addiction in children forcing them to cut themselves off from others and other activities. This has been observed and treated by psychiatrists in the USA. Therefore parents should see that they don't use television as a baby-sitter. Moreover, television viewing should not deprive the family members of opportunity to interact through conversation. They should also know that proportionate to entertainment, news and other information are also necessary.

Parents should send letters of appreciation to producers of exceptional quality programmes and should not hesitate to express their concerns to media people and sponsors as well, if some ideas or values presented are not acceptable. Critical evaluation of advertisements on the media is also highly necessary. Children should be made aware of the exploitative nature of some of the advertisements. They should be trained to ask: "Is it true"?

⁴ Letter on World Communications Day.

To help the families to form good viewing habits, it is essential to conduct media education programmes in schools and parishes. Promotion of courses in basic media skills and in production techniques will enable them to look into the media world with genuine enthusiasm. This will be an encouragement for them to seek careers in the media.

Active support of quality religious programmes through viewing, discussions and promotion is highly necessary. Training in this line is also inevitable. Television and other media should be positively considered because of their immense power to sustain and strengthen communion within the family as well as solidarity with other families. Therefore the church should encourage families, media personnel and public authorities to realise the strength of the media and to use them to promote values which will enhance the quality of social life itself.

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Jose Kallukalam

Family in the Civilization of Love

The family which is considered to be the foundational unit of the society is in a state of crisis today. This phenomenon is not something peculiar to Western developed nations; but owing to the liberalization policies and consumerist tendencies it is also gaining momentum day by day even in the third world countries of the East, which were traditionally known for their compact family set up. But as II Vatican Council states, 'family is a kind of school of deeper humanity'. It is the best school where humans grow from egoism to altruism, from segregation to integration and from 'I-It' to 'I-Thou' relationships. The fundamental role of the family is to form an intimate community of life and love. For this, the mutual understanding and the joint deliberations of spouses, as well as the self-renouncing co-operation of parents in the education of their children is a must. Then only would family recover its waning image as the centre and heart of the civilization of love, in contra-distinction to the civilization of consumerism and utilitarianism.

With the sudden crumbling of the former Soviet Union, the 'Iron Curtain' was torn apart and humankind heaved a sigh of relief that the cold war has come to an end. But today man is seized by another fear. As the nuclear holocaust which was felt imminent at every moment for over forty years is over, we are becoming more aware of a cancer within human society, which seems to eat into its roots and is capable of withering away its life.

Threats to Family

Family, which is the very foundation of society is under threat from within and from without. Modern society is

witnessing a sudden spurt of science and technology. Hasty industrialization without adequate planning has converted cities into vast concrete structures with faceless masses surrounded by slums of miseries. The city is the land of promise, the city of joy, for the millions of jobless village youth. The uncontrolled mass inflow into the city has caused unhealthy over growth for every city especially in India. This has brought millions of families into various kinds of unbearable strains. The joint-family of India has been scattered. Modern technocracy joined with the blinding mass media propaganda is penetrating deep into our social relationships and into our private lives with unprecedented pressures on the family life. The praying family is becoming a 'Video-parlour'. Morals are dictated by media barons, sports' stars and matinee idols. The result is stagnation of the divine element in human life, decline of public morality and erosion of family values. 'Rent-a mother' family and even homosexual family are not only tolerated but even shown as honourable modes of life. While some sociologists think that the prospects of the family is bleak, others predict that the family is "near the point of complete extinction"¹. Recently in an Essay published in the prestigious periodical "Time" from America, Barbara Ehrenreich thinks that the family is becoming "personal hell". She admits certain values that family can have. But she says that for a woman, home is, statistically speaking, the most dangerous place to be. Her worst enemies and potential killers are not strangers but lovers, husbands and those who claimed to love her once". She points out that dozens of children are abused and murdered by their own relatives. She feels that home is all too often where the small and weak fear to lie down and shut their eyes". She claims that the Americans are beginning to think that the family can be "a nest of pathology and a cradle of gruesome violence"².

1 Alwin Toffler, *Future Shock* (London 1971) 219.

2 Barbara Ehrenreich, "Oh, Those Family Values", *Time*, July 18, 94, p. 56

Way back in 1926 Professor S. Radhakrishnan said in one of his Upton Lectures at Manchester College, Oxford: 'We have had sin with us from the beginning of our history, but we have recently begun to worship it. It is not very new for a man or woman who is sick of his or her partner to take to another, but what is really modern is the new philosophy in justification of it. Disguised feeling is masquerading as advanced thought. The woman who gives up her husband for another is idealized as a heroine who has had the courage to give up the hypocritical moral codes and false sentiments, while she who clings to her husband through good report and bad is a cowardly victim of conventions.'³

The world community has already seen this threat to human society and world order. That must be the reason why the United Nations Organization has declared 1994 an International year of the Family.

Even the European parliament approved a resolution that homosexual should enjoy the same 'right' and the adoption of children. The Parliament has "unduly institutionalized deviant kinds of behaviour not in conformity with God's plan and seeks to legitimize a moral disorder"⁴ This is certainly an alarming state of decadence to which the rich west has slipped into.

As the prophets of old had stoutly defended the Sinai Covenant between God and Israel against all odds, so the second Vatican Council has prophetically defended the covenantal institution of the family in its various documents like Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity and Declaration on Christian Education. The present Holy Father, Pope John Paul II is intensely concerned about the safety of the family. The problems that the family is facing are perhaps more dangerous to human society than all the nuclear weapons put together. He has already erected the Pontifical Institute for the Study of Family and Marriage at the Lateran University Rome. He convoked

the Bishops' Synod for a deeper study on Family. He is earnestly encouraging the institution of counselling centres all over the world at the service of family and marriage. The "Apostolic Exhortation: *Famillaris Consortio*" is his great theological homily for the christian families. He has also instituted the Pontifical Council of the Family at Vatican. He has joined with the international community to declare 1994 Church's International year of the family. On february 2, 1994 he wrote his famous Letter to Families. Every now and then he returns to the theme of family in his homilies. The service, promotion and protection of famiyy are his primary concerns. Like prophet Jeremiah who asked Israel: 'Return; faithless Israel' ⁵, this Pope is never tired of pleading with the Christians and all men of good will to come back to the family and live there a peaceful and moral life. He begins the "Apostolic Exhortation: *Familiaris Consortio*" with the observation: "The family in the modern world, as much as and perhaps more than any other institution, has been beset by the profound and rapid changes that have affected society and culture" ⁶. Today there are many powerful lobbies that seek to destroy or deform the family. The Holy Father therefore reminds the leaders of nations: "At this moment in history, when so many powerful forces are arrayed against the family, it is more important than ever that the Conference on Population and Development should respond to the challenge implicit in the United Nations' designation of 1994 as the 'International year of the Family by doing everything within its power to ensure that the family receives from society and the State that protection to which the same Universal Declaration says it is 'entitled'. Anything less would be a betrayal of the noblest ideals of the United Nations" ⁷.

3 Prof. S. Radhakrishnan, *Hindu View of Life* (London, Unwin Books 1960) 63.

4 *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 23 Feb. 1994, p. 8.

5 Jer. 3:12ff.

6 *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 1.

7 *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 23 March 1994 p. 2.

Nature of the family

Family is the smallest cell of human society. Pope John Paul II defines it as follows: "The family is in fact a community of persons whose proper way of existing and living together is communion: *communio personarum*⁸. The family sprouts from marital communion, a covenant in which man and woman make mutual self-gift⁹. The covenant of mutual self-surrender makes them 'one flesh', which one cannot put asunder¹⁰. When that is realized, the family reaches its fulfilment. If the I-thou relationship of the husband and wife effects communion of persons, community 'transcends this frame work and moves towards a society', a 'we'. The family as a 'community' of persons is the first human 'society'... the 'communion' of the spouses gives rise to the 'community' of the family. The 'community' of the family is completely pervaded by the very essence of 'communion'... This smallest cell of society is based on God-given complementarity in man and woman. From this it is clear that both of them enjoy equality in dignity and nature. They are helpers to each other and they are to nurture communion by being mutual support and refuge in need and danger, companions and intimate friends till death separates them, prophets manifesting the mind of God and priests leading to the salvation of Christ.

The inner principle of the primordial communion in the family is love¹². The ancient love poems from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Sumeria and Palestine show the rich tradition of love in their families. Ramayana opens with a curse on the heartless hunter who separated two birds in the intimacy of sex union. According to a Hindu Scripture the great God "became as large as woman and man in close embrace. He caused that self to fall into two parts. From that arose husband and wife"¹³. Therefore the wife in the Indian tradition is 'ardhangi', that is half-self and 'sahadharmini', which means helpmate or partner in the

8 *Letter to Families*, n. 7

9 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, n. 48.

10 Mt., 19:6.

11 *Letter to Families*, n.7.

12 Cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, n 10

13 Cf. *Brihdaraniaka Upanishad*, 1. 4. 3.

pursuit of the ends of life¹⁴. For Kalidasa the husband and wife are united like words and their meanings. The image of *ardhanarisvara* is India's recognition of the mutual relationship of man and woman, the idea of the co-operative, interdependent, separately incomplete but mutually complete masculine and feminine functions"¹⁵. Great achievements of the world, many world-makers as well as world forsakers bear witness to the important part played by love in the family¹⁶. The Greek philosophers emphasise the sacredness of the family and the Roman culture insists on love in the family. The great love stories in the Old Testament, that of Isaac for Rebecca¹⁷, Elkanah for Hannah¹⁸, Jacob for Rachael¹⁹ and David for his son Absalom²⁰ witness to the deep currents of love in Israelite families.

The well known psychologist theologian John Powell points out: "All of us need a place called Home, a sense of community, for a full life. A community is a union of persons who 'have in common', who share in mutuality their most precious possession — themselves. They know and are open to one another. They share in love their persons and their lives. Fully alive people have such a sense of belonging — to their families, to their church, to the human family"²¹. Family is the place where we feel completely at home, where our absence is felt and successes are celebrated, pain is shared, tears are wiped and death will be mourned. "The inescapable law built into human nature is this: We are never less than individuals but we are never merely individuals. No man is an island. Butterflies are free but we need the heart of another as a home for our hearts"²². The sense of belongingness to a family makes us builders rather than destroyers, flexible rather than rigid in attitudes, able to stay in relationships rather than estrange people, great healers of wounds and hurts rather than painful pin-prickers of neighbours. Relationships within the family are usually honest and mutual. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ", is the advice of St. Paul in this regard²³. It applies to all the members

14 Cf. *Rg Veda*, V. 61. 8.

15 Prof. S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society* (London 1966) 164.

16 Cf. *Ibid*, p. 146

17 Gen., 24:62ff.

18 1 Sam. 1:1-5.

19 Gen. 23.

20 2 Sam. 18:33ff.

21 John Powell, *Fully Human, Fully Alive* (Illinois 1976) 27.

22 *Ibid*, pp. 27-28.

23 Eph. 5:21ff.

of the family: husband, wife, children, parents, workers and other dependents.

Mutuality demands togetherness, not only in a bodily manner, but also at the emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects. They keep companionship in living together and they think pray and struggle together. Any function within the family reflects their being "one flesh". All then work together for the supreme oneness and seek to serve one another. Insisting on one's own rights, seeking one's own good alone, arranging self-centred programmes, resenting whatever is costly to oneself in terms of time, energy and money will eventually ruin the family. The main concern of everyone must be "How to serve?" and not "How am I served?" St. Paul tells us in this spirit: "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls"²⁴. When this has become the order of the family, everyone would tell the other, "I want you to become" the best person you can be, even as this is God's plan for you personally"²⁵. To orientate one's own family or community to one's own self, is to reverse the order set by God.

The Christian family

Jesus has assured us: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in the midst of them"²⁶. These words of Christ find their best application in the Christian family. Already by the sacrament of Baptism the members of the Christian family have "put on Christ" and are united with him into one communion²⁷ and are incorporated into him, sharing his suffering, death and resurrection²⁸. Through the intimate sacramental union of marriage the spouses participate in a deeper manner in the saving covenant of intimacy between Christ and the Church, which the Apostle Paul compares to marital union²⁹. The Christian marriage is an ecclesial act in which the whole Mystical Body of Christ is involved. This means that the Church as a whole is present in some way at the Christian marriage. In this way

24 2 Cor. 12:15.

25 Angelo Fernandes, *The Christian Way Today* (Anand 1988) 44

26 Mt. 18:20

27 Gal. 3:27-28.

28 Rom. 6:3-11

29 Eph 5:22ff.

it is the Church which gives birth to the Christian family. The Christian family therefore by its very birth is in a true sense the Church in miniature or the "Domestic Church". The spouses are the primary priests of this home church. The Holy Spirit, who is the principle of life and activity in the Church is dynamically present in the Christian family as its guiding principle. By making marriage a sacrament, Christ gives it a new purpose: "to bring forth children for the Church", to build up the Kingdom of God in history through everyday details is a primary task of the Christian family. The archetypal divine family of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is mirrored in every Christian family.

In various ways Christ has manifested the salvific importance of the Christian family. By his presence at the wedding feast of Cana, he indicated the sanctity of marital union. His family visits and his frequent use of images from the family settings speak for the sacredness of the family. When he cancelled the exceptions given by Moses and defended stoutly the unity and indissolubility of marriage, he was building up a bulwark for family life³⁰.

By making marriage a sacrament, Christ made it an official celebration of the people of God, where he himself would preside over. Thus the Christian family is born in the presence of Jesus Christ and with his blessing as well with an irrevocable guarantee that he would always be present in that family as its unseen head.

According to St. Paul the Christian family takes its origin from the creative and salvific, spousal love-relationship between Christ and the Church. "Since in the Eucharist Christ celebrates his nuptials with his Church bride, it is fitting that it also be the wedding feast of husband and wife"³¹. The Christian family therefore is a form manifestation of the Mystery of Christ's relatedness to the Church in the world and a living image and historical representation of the mystical relationship of the Church to Christ. It is a place of salvation and the high road to Heaven for the members of the family. The Church is a family of families, a true family of God, where we all are privileged to call God

30 Cf. Thomas Buckley, "The Early Church: Exemplar of the Christian Family" in *The Bible Today* (March 1978) 1543

31 James A Mohlar, *Love Marriage, and the Family* (New York 1982)11.

"Abba", Father, and where we become "sons of God in the Son of God", as Tertullian puts it.

St. Paul has clearly emphasised the family dimension of the Church. He greets the church in the "house of" Prisca and Aquila³²; preaches to the households³³; baptizes households³⁴ and celebrates the Eucharist in the households³⁵. Christian family in the primitive Church was a religious centre, where the Gospel was announced and liturgy was celebrated.

Basic features of the Christian family

The Christian family is the primary and essential unit not only of the society but also of the Church. Therefore all the essential aspects of the Christian life in the Church are also true in regard to the Christian family. St. Luke has reported four fundamental aspects of the primitive Christian community.

1. Devotion to the teachings of the Apostles. The eternal Word of God incarnate is Jesus Christ. His words are the primary source of life and unity in the Church as well as in the Christian family. Loyalty to a common creed is a binding principle for unity. Therefore the Christian family must daily read, constantly meditate, faithfully preserve and devoutly put into practice the word of God.

2. Fervent prayer. The early Church was a praying community. They prayed in the Temple and in their homes. St. Luke refers to the prayer in the house of Mary, the mother of Mark³⁶. The family united in prayer is witnessing to the living presence of Christ amidst them. "The family that prays together, stays together" is a valid dictum for all times and places.

3. Participation in the eucharistic celebration. The Paschal mystery of Christ is the source from which the Church took its origin. From the day of Pentecost the Church has never ceased to celebrate the Lord's Supper. It is the total mystery of Christ, the epitome of the entire work of redemption. Through it Christ pre-eminently perpetuates His presence in the Church, constantly

32 Rom. 16:5.

33 Acts, 5:42.

34 Acts, 16:31ff,

35 Acts, 2:46.

36 Acts, 12:12

calling for our union with Him and among ourselves. Thus the eucharistic celebration is the highest religious experience in the Church. It is the source and climactic expression of the unity of the Church. It must be remembered here that the Church first celebrated the Eucharist in the households of Christian believers.

4. Brotherhood. Prophet Isaiah had foretold that the Messiah would establish universal peace, peace between those who are far away and near by³⁷. Christ established this unity by incorporating us into the unity of His body. This body of Christ, which is the Church, is a perfect fellowship, where "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"³⁸. The believers remained one *koinonia* with the common bond of love and incorporated into the one flesh and blood of Jesus Christ³⁹. This mystico-spiritual union with Christ expresses itself in the community of life. "The ideal first community enjoyed table-fellowship with those who were privileged table-fellows of the risen Lord"⁴⁰. In Plato's ideal society everything is in common. According to Aristotle the friends have their good in common. In fact the early Christians expressed their experience of fellowship by sharing everything they had.

The Christian family is a specific realization as well as a form of revelation of the ecclesial communion. The family is at the root of both Church and state. It is the primary instance of the sort of relationship on which society is built. At the same time it is the fundamental human sharing in the divine life from which God builds His Kingdom. It is a love "bringing together the human and the divine"⁴¹.

The role of the Christian family in the Church and Society

1. Forming a community of persons

The design of God for the family includes also its mission, that is what it can and should do. This mission of the family in

37 Is. 57:19.

38 Gal. 3:28.

39 1 Cor. 10:17.

40 *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* 45:24.

41 Donal Murray, *Life and Sacraments* (Dublin 1983) 100. Cf. also *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 49.

history is derived from the nature of the family, and so is the dynamic and existential development of the family itself. Hence the Holy Father makes the great call: "Family, become what you are"⁴².

The most fundamental role of the family is to form a community of persons. God has established the family basically as an "intimate community of life and love"⁴³. The family has therefore the mission to become more and more a community that will find the fulfilment in the Kingdom of God. In its final analysis this role is specified by love. The family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love. This is a living reflection and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ for the Church⁴⁴.

2. Service of life

The second important mission of family is serving life, wherein transmission of life comes first. When God blessed the first parents and said to them, "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it"⁴⁵, he was ordaining the crowning glory of the institution of marriage in the procreation and education of children. Man is created in the image of God. He is given a special call to share in God's life giving love, in His universal fatherhood; that is, man is given an ability to co-operate in a free and responsible manner with God in transmitting the gift of human life and therefore in transmitting the image of God also. Thus it is a fundamental task of the family to serve life, to bring to fulfilment in history the original blessing of God, to transmit by procreation the divine image from person to person⁴⁶.

3. Family the first temple of education

Family by its natural right is the first school of education for the child, they have a right to bring that child to the fulfilment of its potentials. It is only their continued co-operation with God in the ongoing creation of that child⁴⁷. Parents are

42 *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 17.

43 *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 48

44 Cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 17

45 Gen. 1:28.

46 *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 28

47 *The Declaration on Human Rights* by the United Nations has accepted the rights of the parents to educate their children.

co-operators with God in bringing children to this world and so they are co-responsible with Him for bringing the children to emotional, intellectual and personal maturity⁴⁸. The second Vatican is very clear on this point: "Since the parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. Hence parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it"⁴⁹. In the Christian education the second Vatican sees three roles of the christian family: a) personal growth; b) social development; and 3) deepening of christian Faith.

a. Personal growth

Family is the first school of humanity that the child attends. By begetting in love and for love, a new person has within himself or herself the vocation to growth and development⁵⁰. The mutual love between the parents gives the child the first God-experience — that God is love. "The Christian family is marked out, then, as the place where God's love is seen in flesh-and-blood-people today"⁵¹. The intimate love-life in family and the various uninhibited expressions of affection provide the child with a sense of being loved. He gets a close experience of the relationship between the parents. Marriage is and should be the supreme example of human growth in the atmosphere of mutual acceptance, affection and acknowledgement⁵². The child learns self acceptance from the affection and the unconditional acceptance it receives from its parents. It grows from loneliness to relatedness, from selfishness to service and from "I" to "I-Thou" relationship and finally to a harmonious "We",

The family is a place of healing. It gives food and shelter, emotional security and intellectual training and an ability for social outlook. The wounds that we bring from elsewhere, as well as benumbing fear and bursting anger, killing worry and unsettling anxiety, inferiority complex, irritability etc. are healed

48 Cf. Pius XI, *Christian Education of Youth* (1929) no. 45.

49 *Declaration on Christian Education*, no. 3

50 *Ibid.*, no. 36.

51 Angelo Fernandes, *The Christian Way Today* (Anand 1988) 47

52 Donal Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 91

at best in the family. As a school of deeper humanity, the potentials of everyone are discovered and encouraged. The members grow within the family and with that the family too. Bishop Donal Murray correctly observes: "All relations are reciprocal. The parents obviously make the primary contribution to the development of their children, but it is also true that the children are source of human growth for the parents. The generosity in terms of time and patience and attention which the infant demands is a lesson in the meaning of love"⁵³. The children in their turn learn from the experience of parental love to stand by their parents in their old age and loneliness and in times of need⁵⁴. In the family there is on the one side a kind of mutual inward moulding and on the other a blending of life as a whole and the mutual interchange and sharing there of⁵⁵.

b. Social role of the family

The social dimension of the family is something that comes from within the family. The inner life of the family is the primordial experience of social obligations and virtues. This daily experience of the community in family is the first and most important contribution to the society by the family. More than the social works that the family does, it is through by being an exemplary cell of society family makes the most significant contribution to society. The second Vatican in its *Declaration on Christian Education* calls the family "the first school of those social virtues which every society needs"⁵⁶. In the same Declaration the Council teaches us, "It devolves on parents to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and men that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among the children"⁵⁷. The children born in a christian family must be taught to love God and neighbour from their earliest years. They will learn to experience wholesome companionship. It is into the family that new citizens are born and in it they are first educated. In it they learn and exercise their first social virtues. Thus the social life of mankind begins in the family. Therefore an ambient of love must pervade in the

53 *Life and Sacrament*, op. cit; p. 91

54 *Gaudium et Spes*, no 48.

55 Pius XI, *Cast. Connubii*, no. 50.

56 Cf. no. 3.

57 *Ibid.*

family into which the children are born. Love must be the air, which the child breathes first and love is the breath of life for the family. Love is like light, dynamic by nature. It moves out from the family members to the ecclesial circle. The Church then becomes like a large home with fraternal dimensions. Wider still love urges beyond the faith to all mankind in which everybody is brother or sister and where the face of Christ is seen in everyone, especially those in need. Love places the christian family at the service of all human persons and of the world, not closed up in itself, but wide open to its responsibility toward the whole society⁵⁸. Thus the family introduces the new citizens gradually into civic partnership with their fellowmen and into the people of God⁵⁹.

When the family is healthy, society flourishes. Family produces responsible adults, who will later turn out to be responsible parents. The family is therefore "the foundation of society"⁶⁰. It is therefore important that for building up a healthy society this primary cell functions well. Then the members of the family will be able to contribute positively towards the larger human society.

A good family does not remain a close selfish group of people. It is also concerned with the good of the neighbours and in fact it makes good neighbours. The christian parents must teach their children to recognize God's love for all men, especially the down trodden and unwanted. By word and example the children should be taught to transcend the family boundaries and open their minds and life to ecclesiastical and temporal communities⁶¹.

Family is society in miniature. The gruesome social problems which loom large on society today have their roots in the family. The problem of relationship between authority and individual responsibility and between authority and service are first met in the family. Society grows by a constant interplay of differences. The family is the starting point, where "various generations come together and help one another to grow wiser and harmonize

58 Michael J Wrenn, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

59 *Declaration on Christian Education* no. 3.

60 *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 52

61 *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 30.

personal rights with the other requirements of social life''⁶². In a word, family is the principal school of social education, the chief trainer of inter-personal relationship, the first moderator of distributive justice and the first place where authority is transformed into service.

The Family has therefore a political duty to see that the state is adopting and enforcing such laws that will protect its life and rights or else the family itself will be the first victim of state autocracy and social injustice.

c: Christian family is a school of faith

One of the concepts that after the Second Vatican Council became popular in theological literature is that the christian family is "a church in miniature". The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* declares "For from the wedlock of Christians there comes the family in which new citizens of human society are born. By the 'grace' of the Holy Spirit in Baptism these are made children of God, thus perpetuating the People of God through centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should by their word and example, be first preachers of faith to their children"⁶³.

Jesus Christ entrusted His three offices with the Church. Which are shared by the family also. The sacrament of marriage makes a special gift of Christ's sanctifying love for the Church to the spouses. They in their being in one flesh participate in a special way in the sanctifying office of Christ. The Christian family is called not only to be holy, but also to sanctify the ecclesial community and the world. They can not only approach the Father in worship but also lead others to Him. They are to raise up a holy people and lead all nations to the Father. The family is the first torch bearer of the Gospel for its children. Already at creation the Word of God is at the service of human family. The whole material universe is created as an abode for the first human family. At the same time God challenged them with His plan of sharing His life with them, through the exercise of their will and freedom⁶⁴.

62 *Gaudium et Spes*, no, 52

63 *Lumen Gentium*, no 11

64 Pushparajan "The Bible and the Family", in *Vidya Jyoti* (LIV) n.7, p. 238.

In the Old Testament God has often selected certain families as instruments of His communication with mankind. It is worth noting that in the Old Testament times faith education was done in the family tradition. In Deuteronomy we find this command to this effect: "When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the Lord showed signs and wonders great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes and He brought us out from there...'"⁶⁵. The substantial Word of God was conceived in the womb of Mary. But it must not be forgotten that He chose a family as a congenital place of growth. Most of his life on earth was spent in the family. Even during His public life, He had time to spare for families. The early christian faith was preserved and proclaimed in the 'House-Churches'. St. Paul lived and worked in the house of Aquila and Priscilla at Corinth⁶⁶. In the same line the christian parents are called to share their faith with their children and with others. This demands that their faith be firm like a rock. In faith the christian spouses will "discover and admire with joyful gratitude the dignity to which God has deigned to raise the marriage and family, making them a sign and meeting place of the loving covenant between God and men, between Jesus Christ and His bride, the Church"⁶⁷ says Pope John Paul II. "The Christian family, in fact, is the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person during growth and to bring him or her through a progressive education and catechesis to full human and christian maturity"⁶⁸.

The christian family has its origin in grace and develops in grace. It is into this graced situation the children are born. Through the family children are introduced into the people of God. A truly christian family is therefore vital for the

65 Dt. 6: 20ff.

66 There are some research scholars who think that "It was only a historical accident that in the course of time the Bible became the monopoly of the clergy and the monks. (Pushparajan, art. Cit., p.330.)

67 *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 51.

68 *Ibid.*, no 2

life and development of God's own people⁶⁹. When all the members in the family evangelize and are evangelized, family life becomes a pilgrimage in Faith, a training ground for the following of Christ. Furthermore by praying with their children, by reading the word of God with them, and by introducing them deeply through christian initiation into the Body of Christ, both the eucharistic and ecclesiastical body, they become fully parents, in that they are begetters not only of bodily life but also of the life that through the Spirit's renewal flows from the Cross and the Redemption of Christ⁷⁰.

The common prayer in the family makes Jesus Christ present in the family. It is then an echo of the prayer of the Church. When every family is a praying family, Christ dwells "in the great family of nations so that together with him all of us can truly say: "Our Father"! Prayer must become the dominant element of the Year of the Family in the Church: prayer by the family, prayer for the family, and prayer with the family⁷¹. Prayer brings the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit in the family and strengthens its spiritual unity. The family that prays together, stays together. In the prayer of the family all members must be present and each one prays for the others, and for the whole family and the whole family prays for all. Then not only those who are living but also the dead are remembered and spiritually united. "In prayer, the family discovers itself as the first 'us' in which each member is "I" and "thou"; each member is for the others, either husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter, brother or sister, grand-parent or grand child⁷². When all the families enjoy the inner unity and peace, the world peace becomes a reality. For, the love becomes the principle of life for the family and through the family for the world. The family which originates in love, shares in the spousal love of Christ to the Church, joins the eternal concelebration of love in the Holy Trinity, is able to share that love among other families. In the world will then prosper a *civilization of love*.

Pope Paul VI visualized a new culture of love which he calls civilization of love⁷³. Pope John Paul II is really a prophet of the *civilization of love*. Man carries the image of

69 Declaration on Christian Education, no.3. 70 Cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, no.52

71 Pope John Paul II, *Letter to the Families*, Feb. 2, 1994.

72 Ibid, no. 10 73 Homily on 25, December 1975: AAS (1976)145.

God within himself. When God gave man the 'dominion' over all the created beings and power to "subdue" the earth, he accepted a task of shaping the world in His own likeness. The fulfilment of this mission of man is hominization of the world. "So we can say", concludes the Holy Father, "that the civilization of love originates in the love of God who is love"⁷⁴. This civilization manifests itself when the families cooperate with God's love that "has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us"⁷⁵. The civilization of love is the branching out of the true vine, Jesus, through the intimate love in the families to the universal family of mankind. The Church is the vanguard of this civilization of love and constantly summons all families and other social, national and international institutions to this coming civilization of love. "*The family in fact depends for several reasons on the civilization of love, and finds therein the reasons for its existence as family. And at the same time the family is the centre and the heart of the civilization of love*"⁷⁶. The civilization of love by its very nature is pro-life and opposed to everything that is anti-life. The modern utilitarianism is "a civilization of production and use, a civilization of 'things' and not 'persons', a civilization in which persons are used in the same way as things are used. In the context of a civilization of use, woman can become an object for men, children a hindrance to parents, the family an institution obstructing the freedom of its members"⁷⁷.

Lex orandi, lex credendi: As we pray, so we believe. If the element of common prayer were missing, the christian family would miss also its very character as a domestic church⁷⁸. The ecclesial character demands that this domestic sanctuary of the Church, should not only pray together, but also celebrate some parts of the liturgy of the Hours at least on certain important occasions, so as to enter deeply into the life of the Church. Then it is Christ who is the real leader of that prayer in the family. As St. Augustine so beautifully said, then "we hear our voices in His voice and His voice in ours"⁷⁹. Jesus Christ is the

74 1 Jn. 4:8, 16.

75 Rom. 5:5.

76 *Letter to the Families*, no. 13

77 Ibid. 78 Pope Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, no. 52

79 *Discourse on Psalms*, 85, 1; CCL, 39, 1176.

Firstborn of all mankind. So there is a bond between the prayer of Jesus and the prayer of every christian family. Hence liturgical prayer is the ideal for the christian family⁸⁰.

Family prayer is not the private prayer of the individual members of the family. It is that prayer which rises from the "one Flesh" of the sacramental oneness of the family. In that they find their unity in Christ's union with the Church. Then the husband and wife look mutually and find Christ in the loving spouse and they together as parents in the children and vice-versa. It is in the family prayer that the children are given faith education from their earliest days of life. "The family is man's spiritual habitat. The more intimately joined to Christ by prayer the family is, the more the Kingdom of God on earth is realized and the further humanity is advanced and transformed"⁸¹. When St. Peter tells that Christians make a "holy priesthood" he applies it very much to the christian families. And he asks them to "offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"⁸². The Christian families are thus called upon to offer their daily family experiences, as a sacrifice pleasing to God⁸³. Thus the sorrows and joys, failures and successes, toils and worries and all the hardships and sharings in the family become a sacrifice pleasing and acceptable to God. God will certainly "accept *this offering from every family* just as he accepts the bread and wine in the Eucharist. He wants to unite these human joys and hopes as well as the inevitable sufferings and worries typical of the family life, with the bread and wine destined for *transubstantiation*, thus placing them within the mystery of his body and blood. He then offers this Body and this Blood in communion as a source of spiritual energy not only for every individual but also for every family"⁸⁴.

80 *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 61

81 Michael J. Wrenn, op. cit., p. 202.

82 1 Peter. 2:5.

83 Rom. 12:1.

84 Pope John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano* (Weekly Ed. in English) N.1. (1322) 5 Jan. 1994, p.11.

Thus the christian family, like the Church, is both teacher and mother. We learn our mother tongue at home. So too we realize that we are children of God from our childhood experience of parental love for God, for each other for the children and for others. Thus the prayer life at home is the firm foundation for a God-oriented world order and international peace.

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